



Elephanta





Illustrated Classics From India

ELEPHANTA

In a country with such a high percentage of illiteracy, it is amazing how Indian culture is available to us in an unbroken thread through the labyrinth of history as well as several dark centuries whose records show innumerable blank pages. This is because our culture has been conveyed through interesting legends and stories which have a spread to all four corners of our country, unsullied by time and unchanged by the environment.

Till date, the stories in the Amar Chitra Katha series were drawn from legends of India based on literary sources. However, our culture that goes back 5000 years has not come to use merely through literary sources. The written word, in prose, poetry or drama, is only one of them. The mother putting her child to sleep with a story, the grandmother feeding her grandchild and distracting him with exciting tales from the *Puranas* were how most of us learnt our heritage. The temple storyteller or the wandering minstrel, singing tales of courage and romance, is a common sight to this day. Folk and classical dancers convey stories of our legends through the exciting medium of the dance.

The most permanent source has been the transfer of our culture through monuments, their sculptures and paintings. They were brought down to us through legends of ancient India with strength, sensitivity and grace. Whether the medium used was wood, stone, or paint, our artists and artisans have paid homage to our great culture and kept intact these immortal myths and legends of India.

This Amar Chitra Katha brings you legends depicted in some of the sculptures found on the island of Elephanta, across Mumbai's harbour.

Founder Editor: Anant Pai

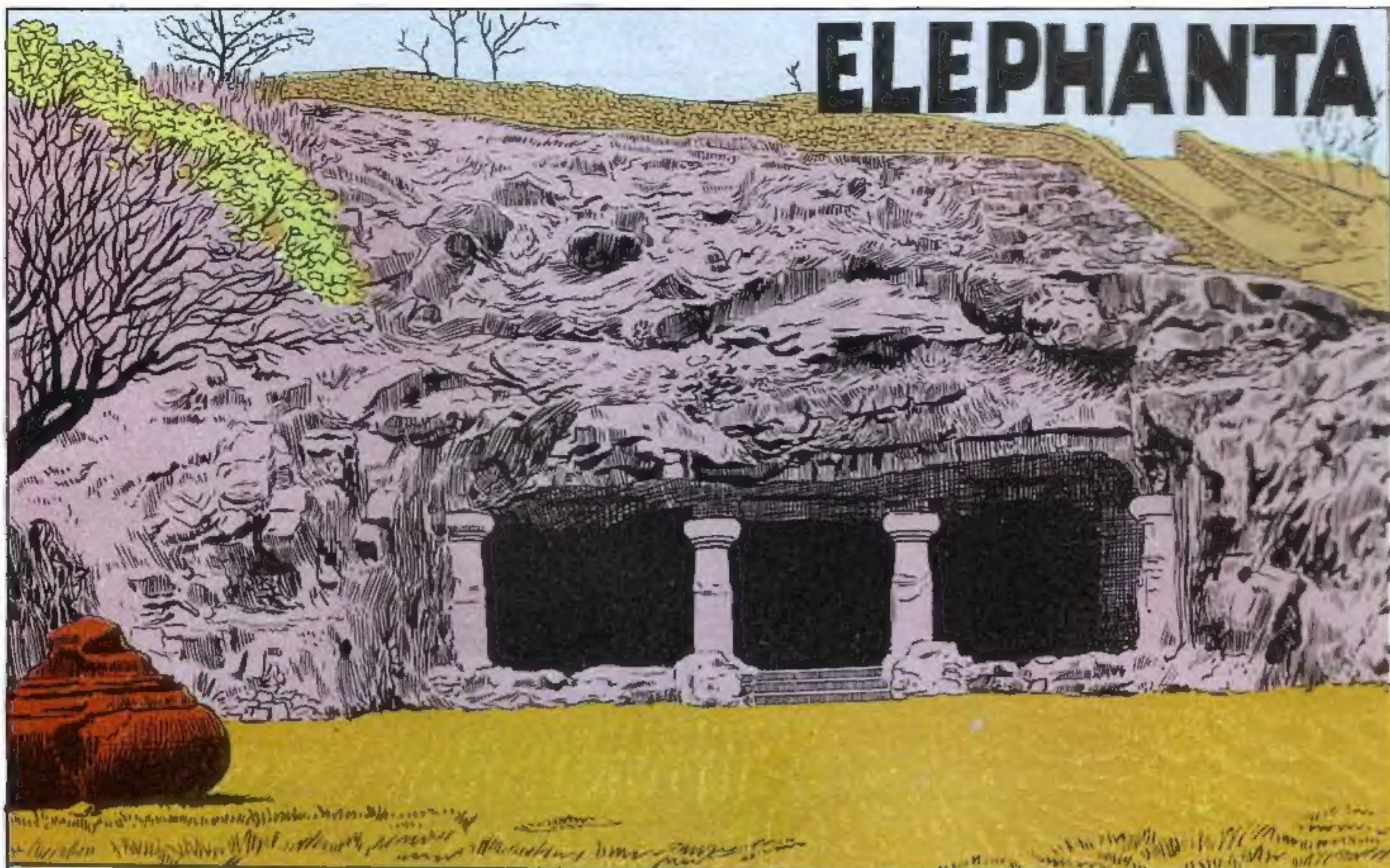
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ELEPHANTA

BEYOND BOMBAY HARBOUR, ACROSS THE BLUE WATERS, LIES THE GREEN ISLE OF ELEPHANTA. A SHORT WALK UPHILL TAKES YOU TO THE CAVE TEMPLES, CUT OUT OF SOLID ROCK BY THE HAND OF MAN. INSIDE THE MAIN CAVE MAY BE SEEN SOME OF THE FINEST SCULPTURES OF INDIAN ART CARVED ABOUT 1300 YEARS AGO.

WITH PIETY AND FAITH IN THEIR HEARTS AND SKILL IN THEIR FINGERS, PATIENTLY AND LABORIOUSLY, ARTISANS CREATED EXQUISITE WORKS OF ART FOR POSTERITY.



THESE CAVES WERE CARVED DURING THE REIGN OF THE MAURYAS OF THE KONKAN...



...WHO WERE DEFEATED IN A GREAT NAVAL BATTLE OFF ELEPHANTA BY THE CHALUKYAN KING, PULAKESIN II.

HAIL EMPEROR
PULAKESIN!



AFTER BEING RULED BY SEVERAL HINDU DYNASTIES, THE ISLAND FELL TO THE SULTANS OF GUJARAT AND PASSED FROM THEM TO THE PORTUGUESE WHOSE SOLDIERS DAMAGED MANY OF THE SCULPTURES.

HA! HA! I HAVE
HIT THE NOSE
THIS TIME.

I HAVE DONE
BETTER! I HAVE
KNOCKED OFF
AN ARM!



THE ISLAND WAS THEN TAKEN
BY THE MARATHAS.

HAIL, EMPEROR
SAMBHAJI!

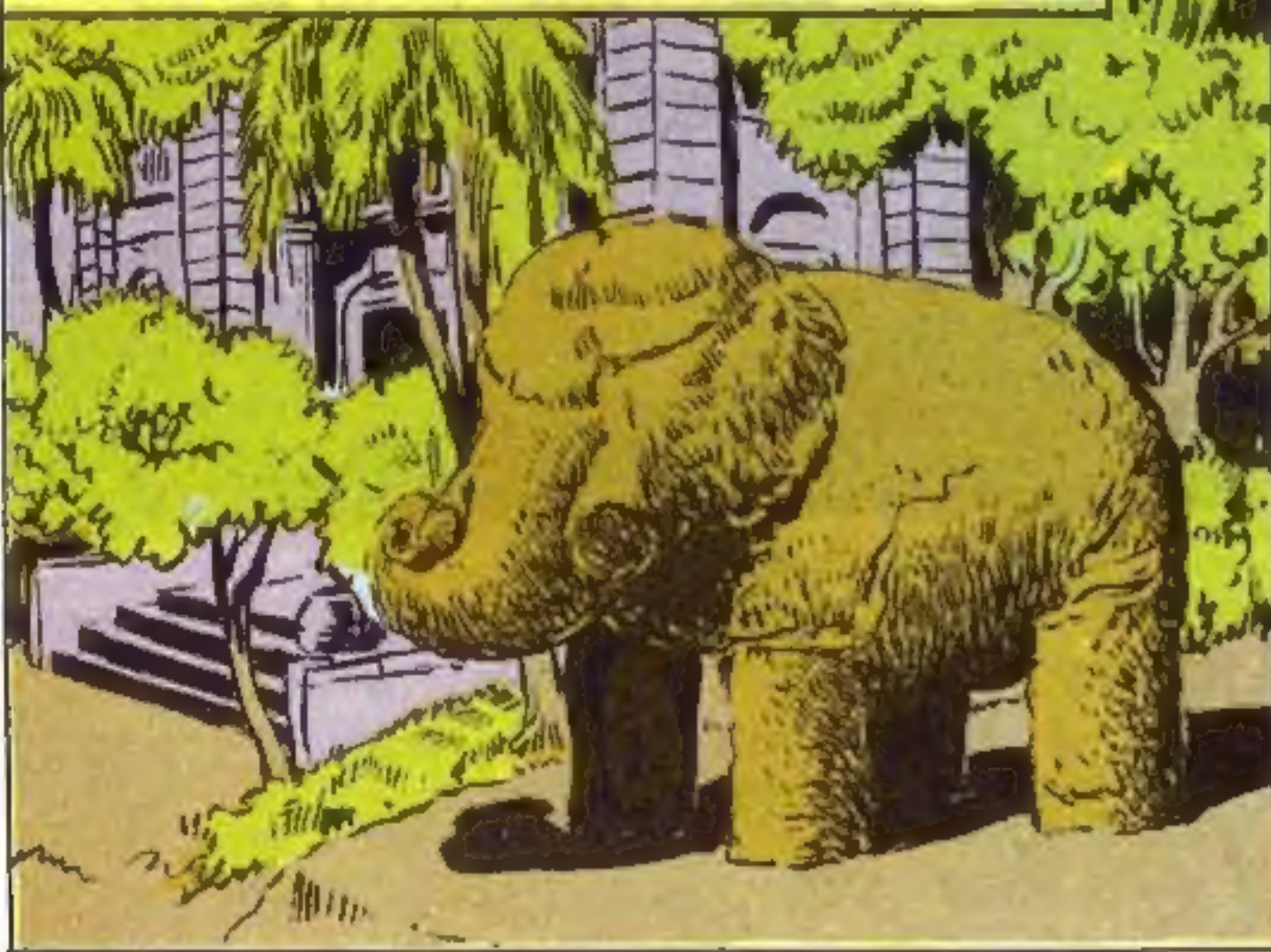
WE SHALL MAKE
THIS ISLAND AN
INVINCIBLE FORT.



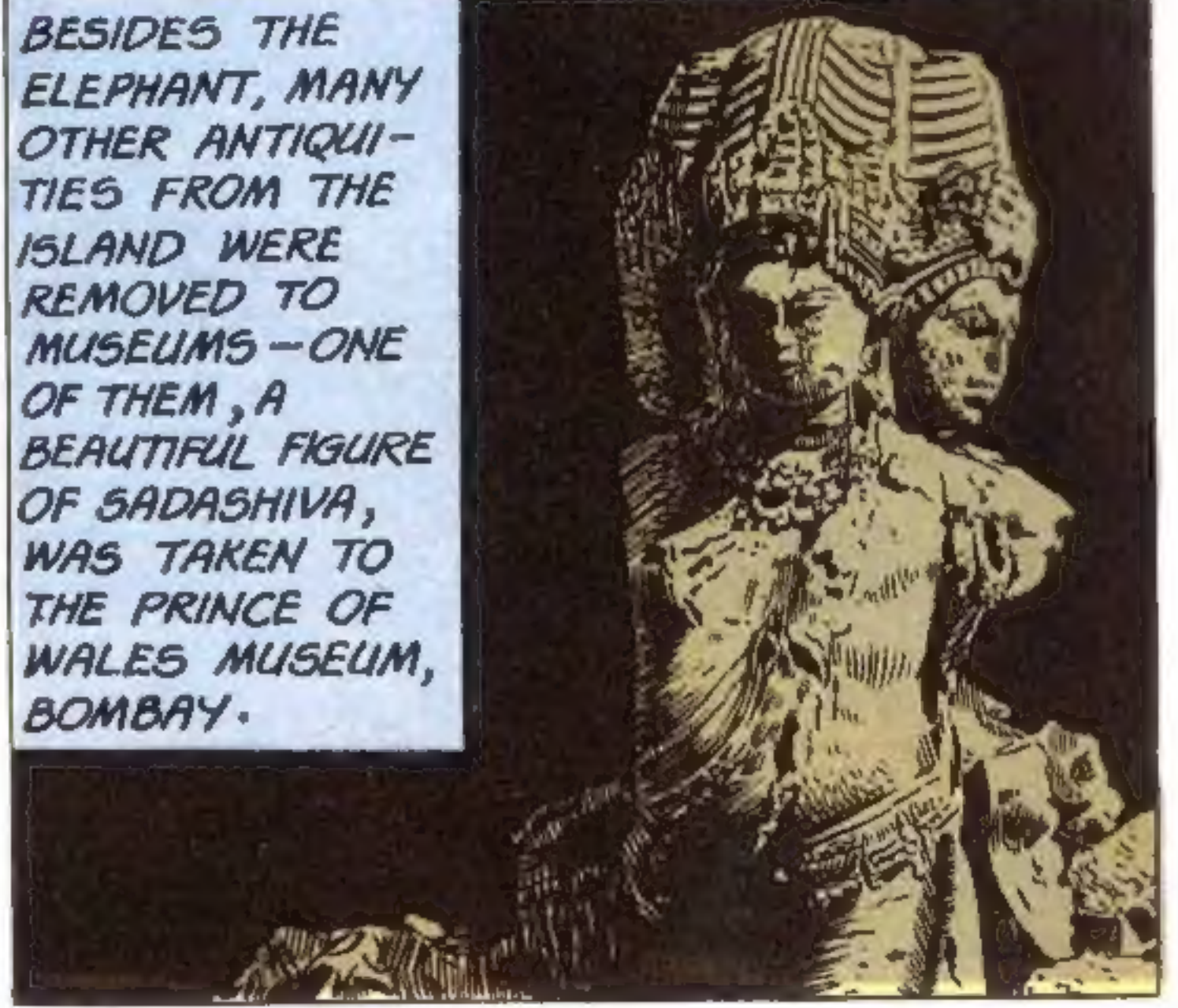
THE EARLY NAMES OF THIS ISLAND WERE GHARAPURI AND SRIPURI. WHEN THE PORTUGUESE FIRST LANDED ON THE ISLAND—



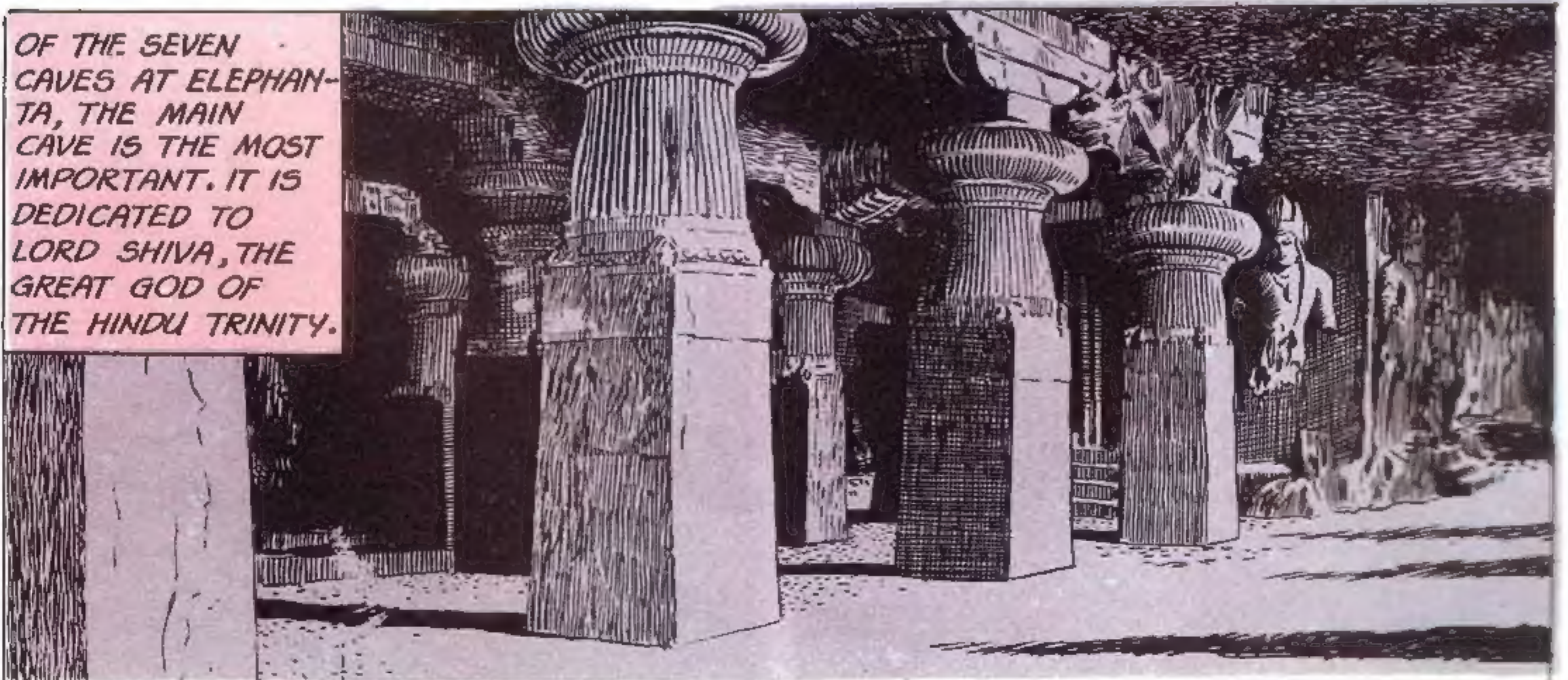
THE STONE ELEPHANT WAS LATER REMOVED BY THE BRITISH TO THE VICTORIA GARDENS† AT BOMBAY.



BESIDES THE ELEPHANT, MANY OTHER ANTIQUITIES FROM THE ISLAND WERE REMOVED TO MUSEUMS—ONE OF THEM, A BEAUTIFUL FIGURE OF SADASHIVA, WAS TAKEN TO THE PRINCE OF WALES MUSEUM, BOMBAY.



OF THE SEVEN CAVES AT ELEPHANTA, THE MAIN CAVE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT. IT IS DEDICATED TO LORD SHIVA, THE GREAT GOD OF THE HINDU TRINITY.



† NOW KNOWN AS VEERMATA JIJABAI BHONSLE UDYAN

IN THE MAIN CAVE, THE FIRST FIGURE AT THE RIGHT, IS THAT OF SHIVA AS NATARAJA*. HIS DANCE SYMBOLISES THE ETERNAL MOTION OF THE UNIVERSE.



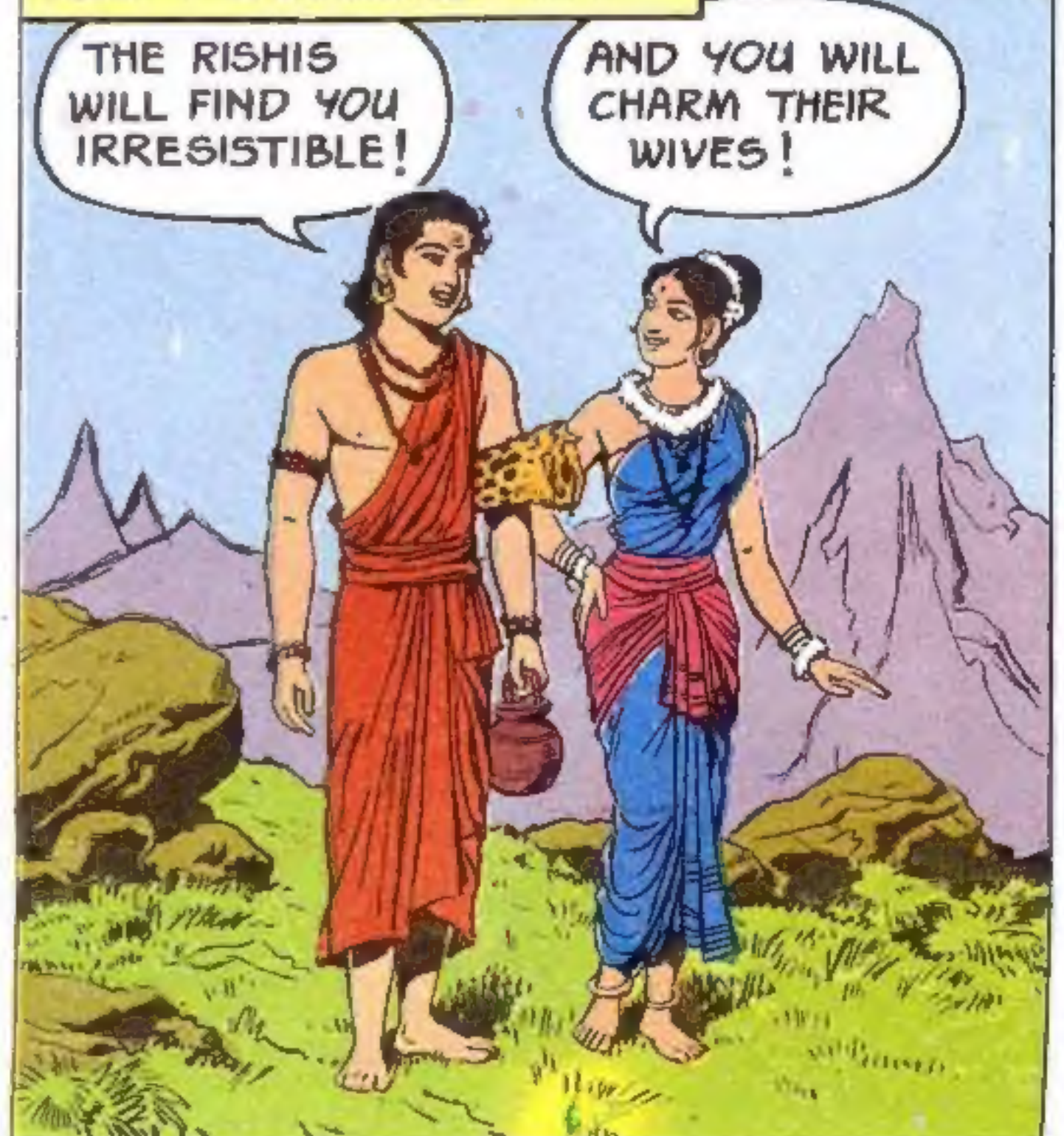
LONG, LONG AGO, IN THE FOREST OF TARAGAM, THERE LIVED TEN THOUSAND RISHIS + WHO BY VIRTUE OF THEIR PENANCES HAD BECOME VERY POWERFUL.



AT KAILASA, SHIVA TURNED TO VISHNU.



SHIVA TOOK THE FORM OF A HANDSOME, YOUNG YOGI AND VISHNU THAT OF THE YOGI'S CHARMING WIFE.



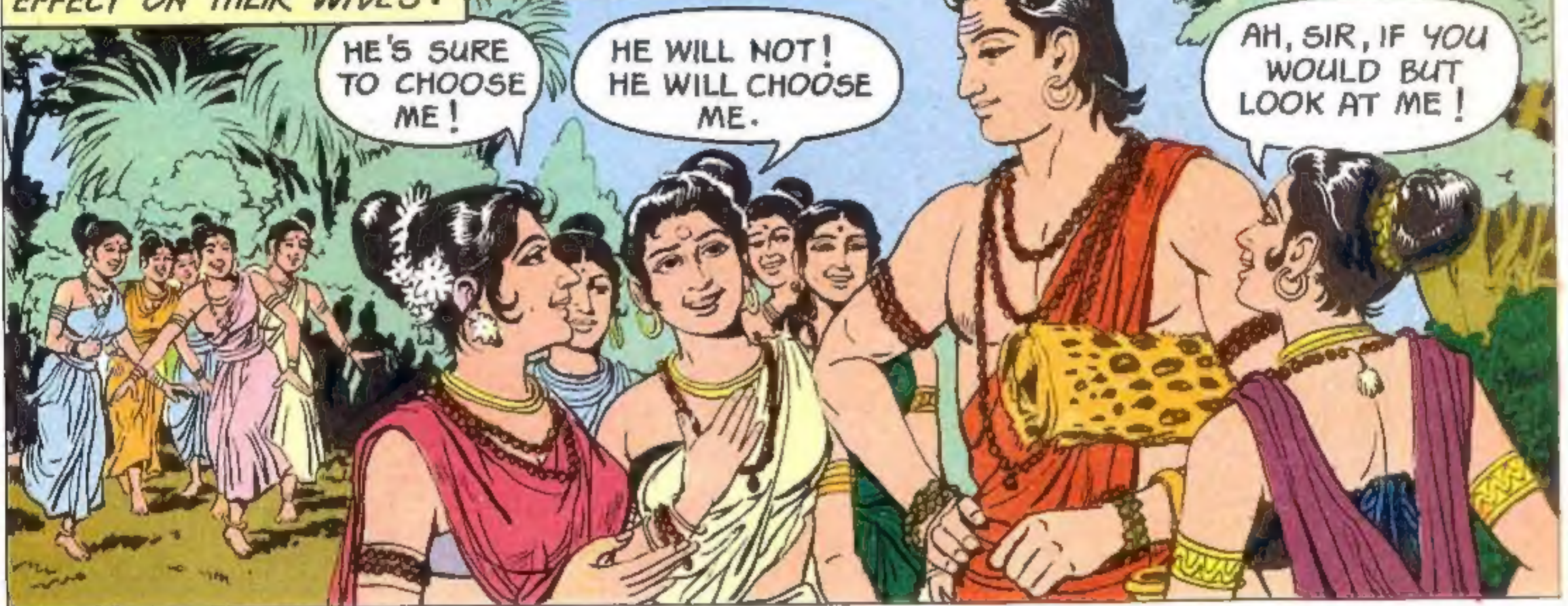
AS SOON AS THEY APPEARED BEFORE THE RISHIS —



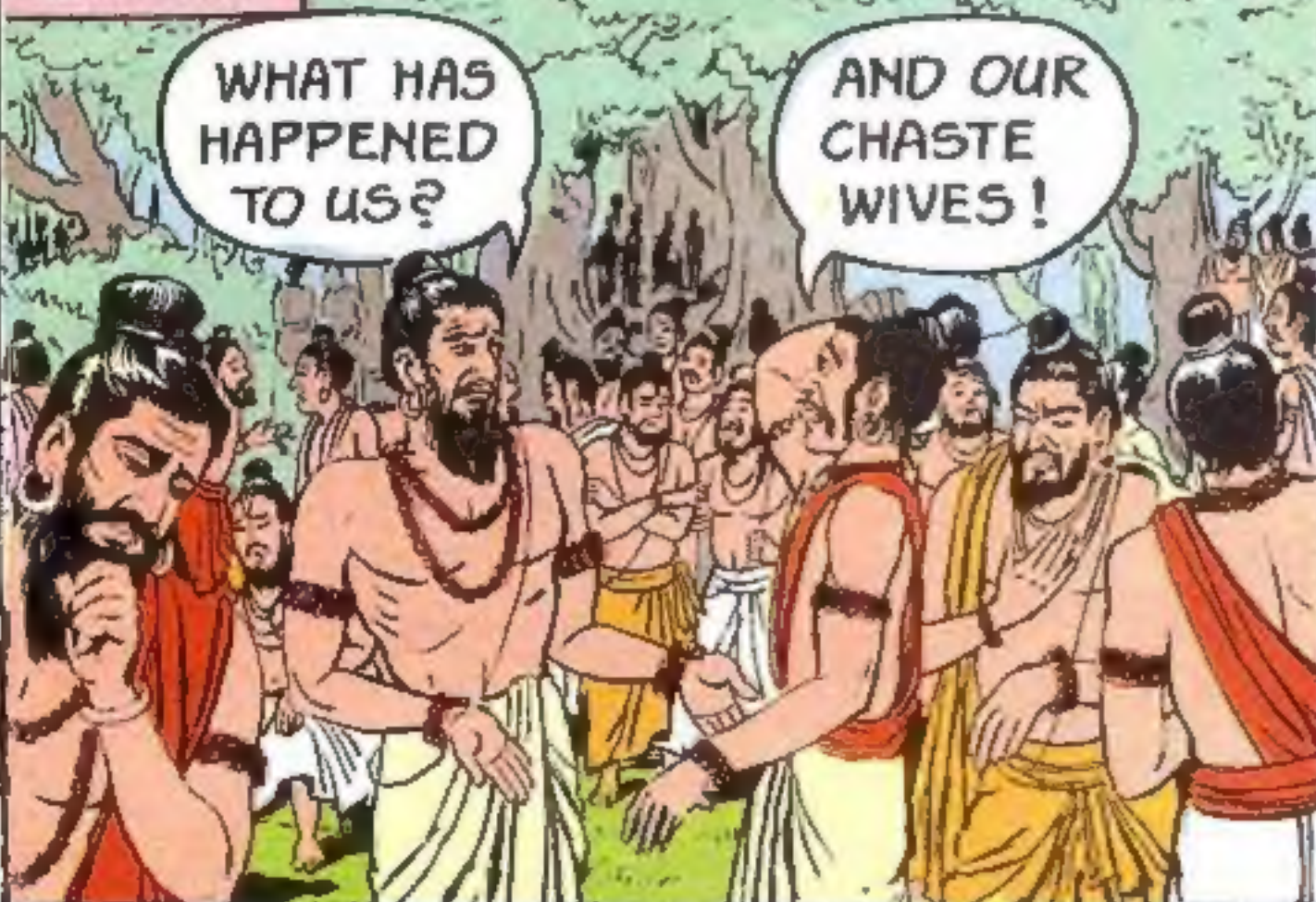
LEAVING THE SACRIFICE UNFINISHED, THEY WALKED TOWARDS THE YOGI'S WIFE.



MEANWHILE, THE YOGI HAD THE SAME DISASTROUS EFFECT ON THEIR WIVES.



SUDDENLY THE RISHIS CAME TO THEIR SENSES.



THEY REALISED THAT THEY WERE BEING DELUDED BY SOME SUPERNATURAL POWER.

MAY YOU AND YOUR MAGICAL POWERS BE CURSED!

AND CURSED BE YOUR WIFE, THE SERPENT IN A WOMAN'S GUISE!



THEIR CURSES, HOWEVER, WERE OF NO AVAIL.

SO THEY PREPARED A SACRIFICIAL FIRE.



THEY POURED GHEE INTO IT, CHANTING MANTRAS ALL THE WHILE.



SUDDENLY, A TIGER SPRANG FROM THE FIRE.



UNPERTURBED, SHIVA CAUGHT IT IN AN IRON GRIP...



...FLAYED IT...



... AND DRAPED ITS SKIN OVER HIS BODY.



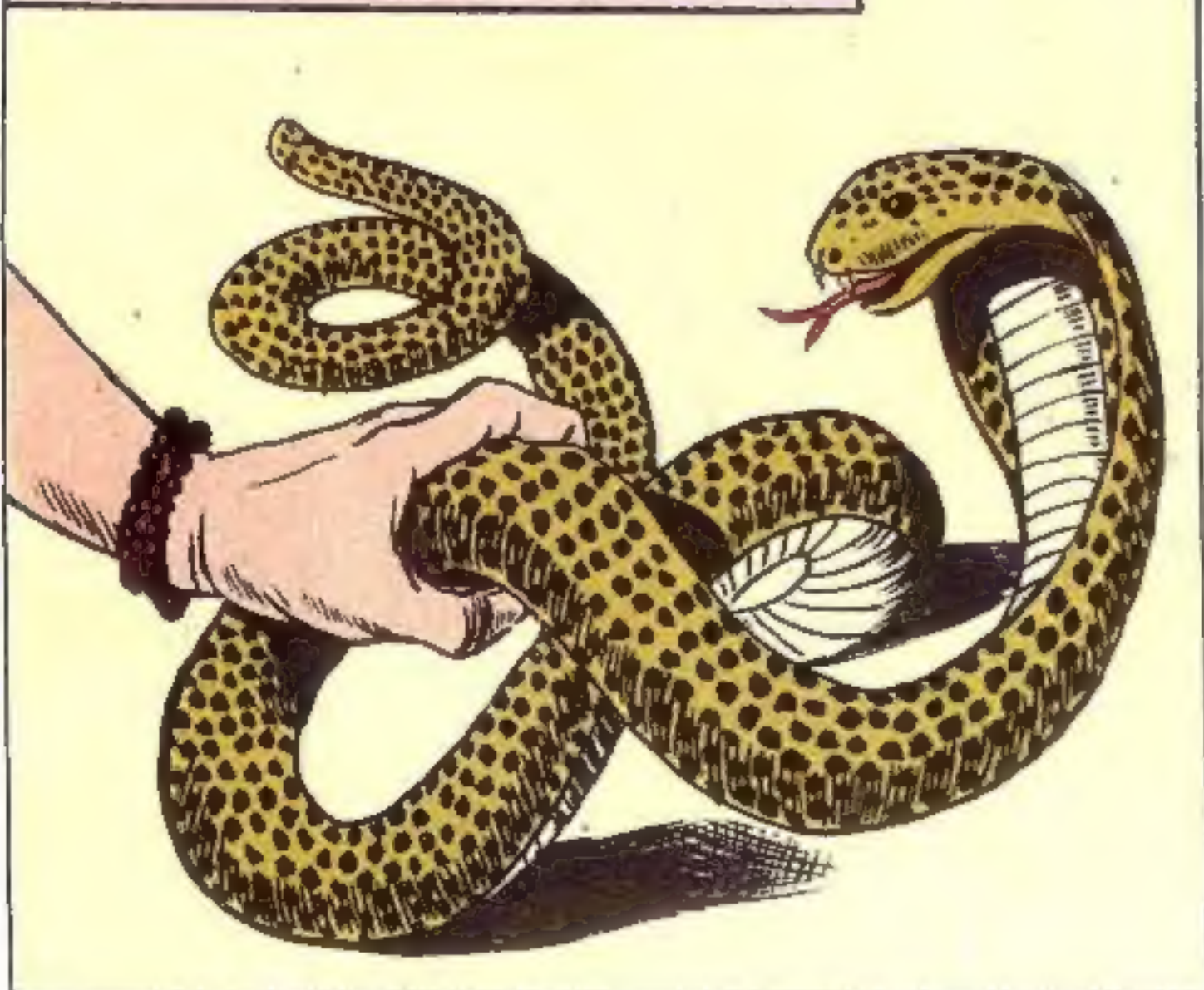
THE NEXT MOMENT,
A SNAKE EMERGED
FROM THE FIRE...



...AND DARTED
AT SHIVA.



HE CALMLY PICKED IT UP...



...AND WORE IT AS A GARLAND.



HARDLY HAD HE DONE SO WHEN, FROM THE FIRE, THERE EMERGED AN EVIL DWARF.



IN REPLY, SHIVA DASHED THE EVIL CREATURE TO THE GROUND...

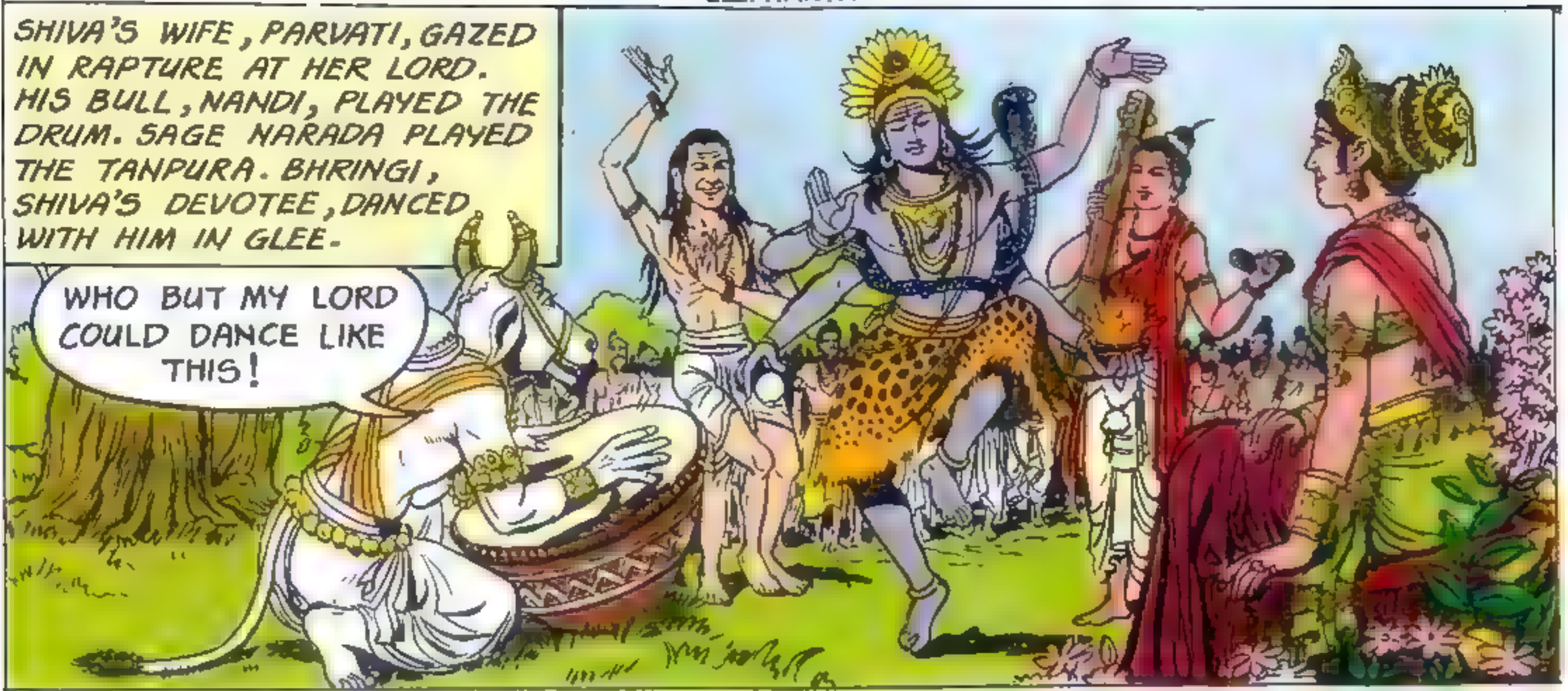


... ASSUMED HIS OWN FORM AND BEGAN TO DANCE. GOOD HAD TRIUMPHED OVER EVIL! THE RISHIS AND THE DEVAS IN HEAVEN GAZED IN AWE AND WONDER AT THE POWERFUL DANCE IN WHICH ALL CREATION AND THE COSMIC UNIVERSE WAS SET IN MOTION



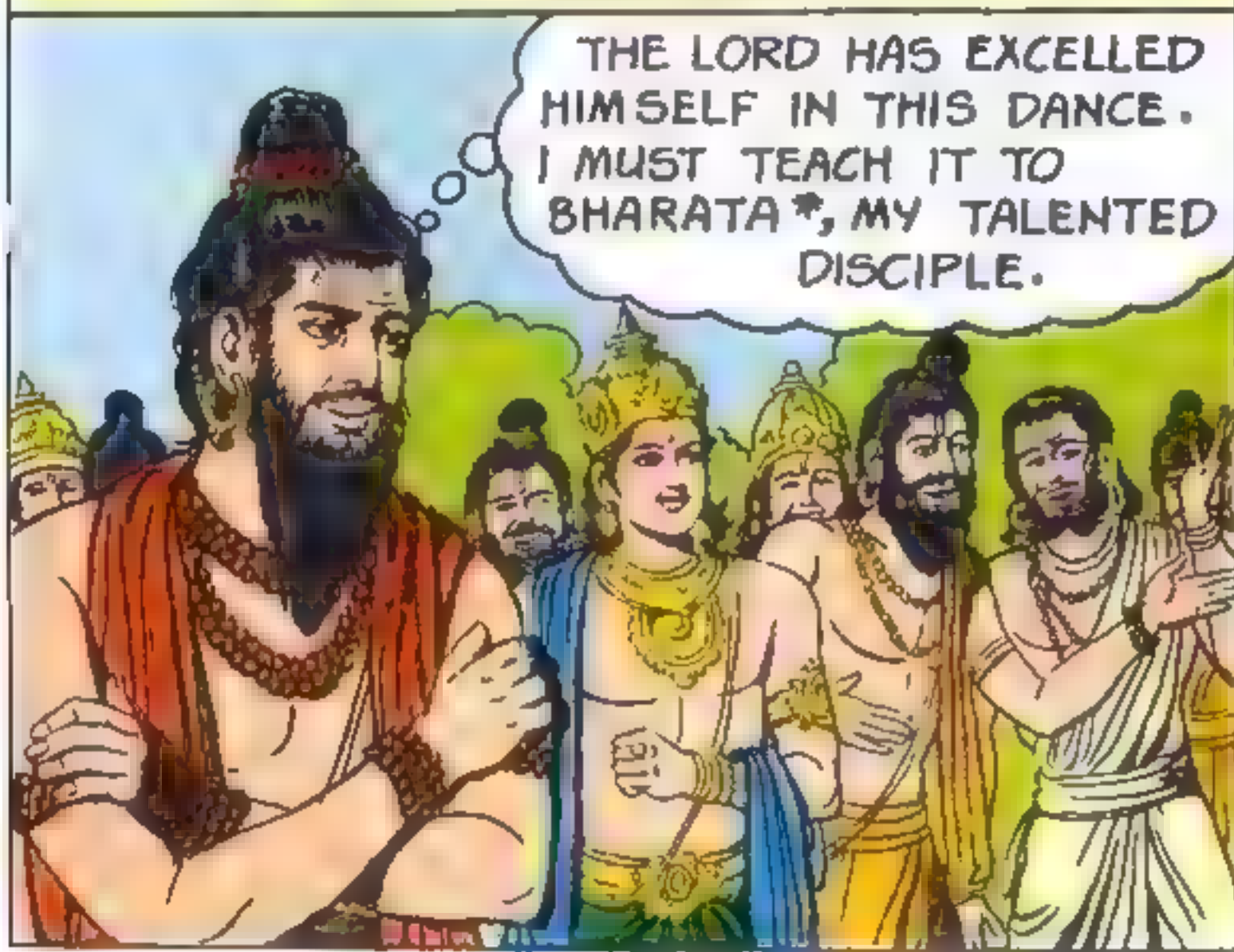
SHIVA'S WIFE, PARVATI, GAZED IN RAPTURE AT HER LORD. HIS BULL, NANDI, PLAYED THE DRUM. SAGE NARADA PLAYED THE TANPURA. BHRINGI, SHIVA'S DEVOTEE, DANCED WITH HIM IN GLEE.

WHO BUT MY LORD COULD DANCE LIKE THIS!



TANDU, SHIVA'S DISCIPLE, WAS AMAZED.

THE LORD HAS EXCELLED HIMSELF IN THIS DANCE. I MUST TEACH IT TO BHARATA*, MY TALENTED DISCIPLE.



THE HEARTS OF SHIVA'S SONS, GANESHA† AND KUMARA, BRIMMED WITH PRIDE.

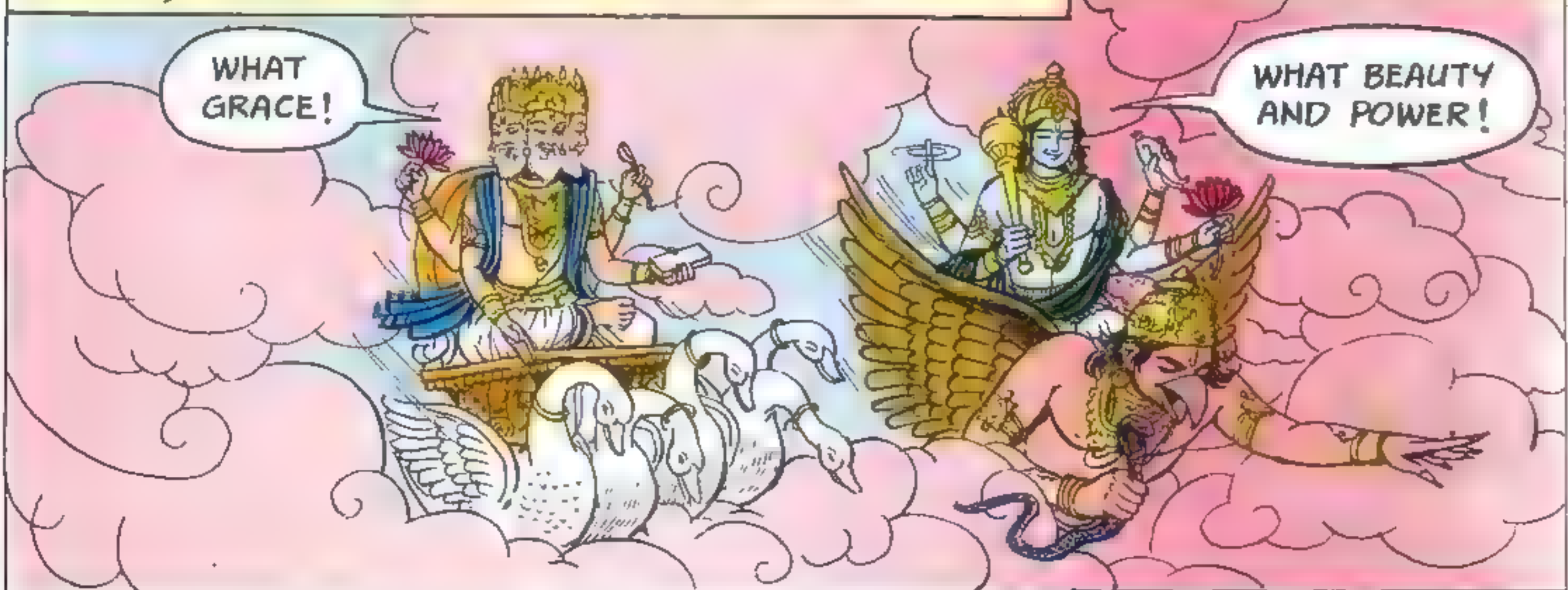
NO ONE CAN DANCE LIKE HIM.



BRAHMA, THE CREATOR, CARRIED BY HIS FIVE SWANS, AND VISHNU ON GARUDA, HIS VEHICLE, LOOKED DOWN FROM THE HEAVENS IN JOY.

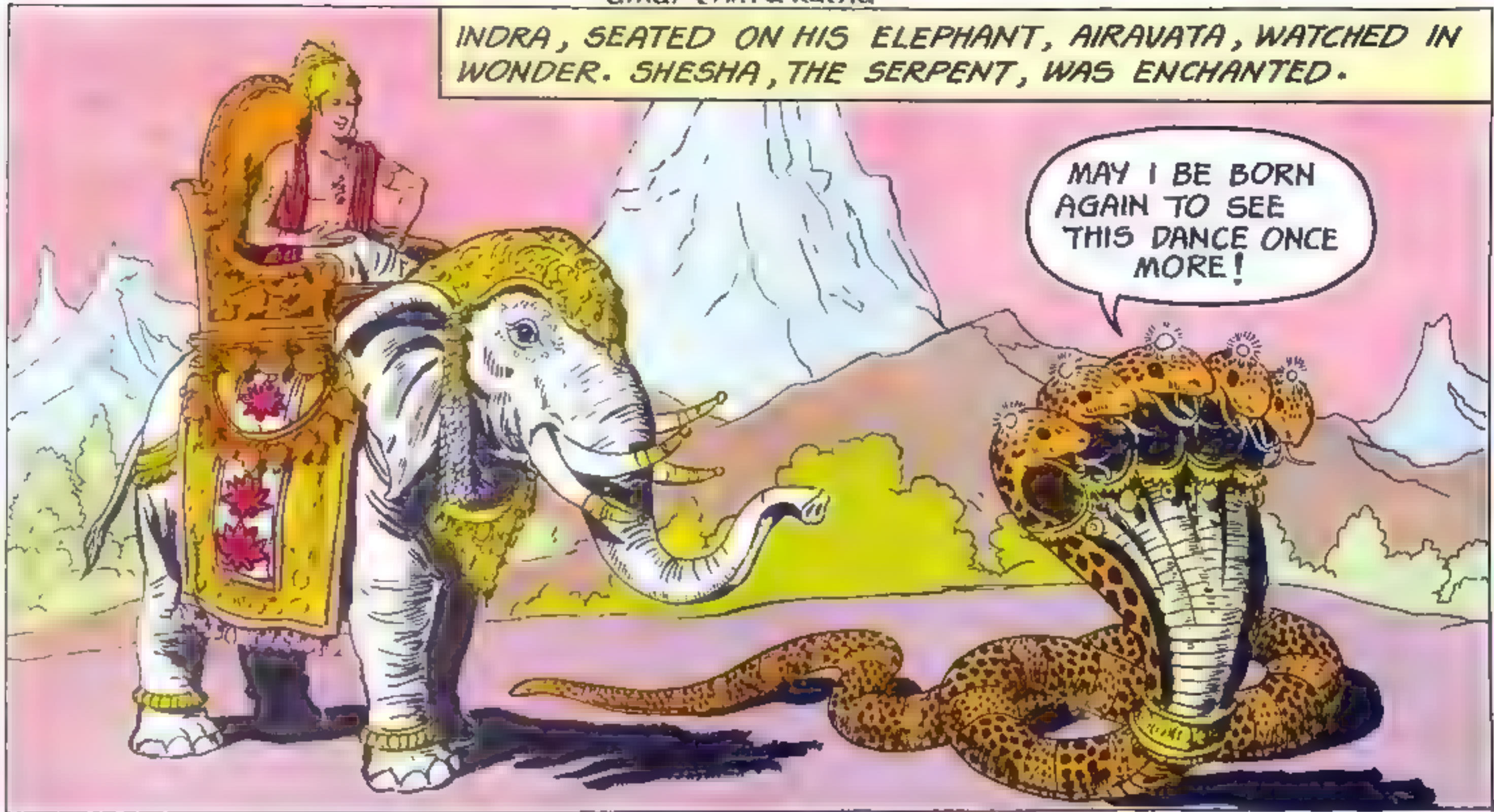
WHAT GRACE!

WHAT BEAUTY AND POWER!

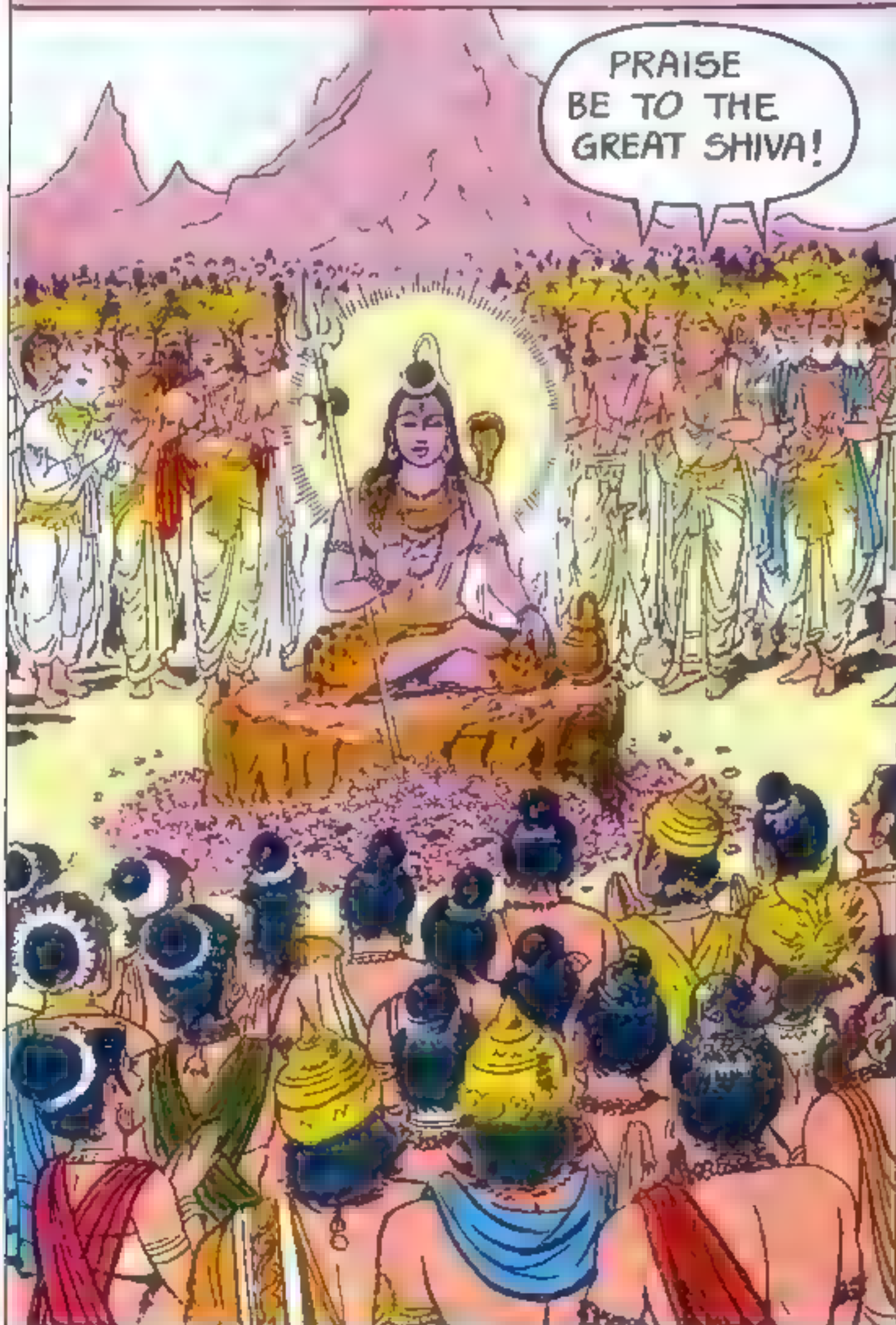


* POPULARLY ACCEPTED AS THE AUTHOR OF NATYA SHASTRA, A VOLUMINOUS TREATISE ON DANCE AND DRAMA
† SEE AMAR CHITRA KATHA NO. 89

INDRA, SEATED ON HIS ELEPHANT, AIRAVATA, WATCHED IN WONDER. SHESHA, THE SERPENT, WAS ENCHANTED.



AND ALL THOSE GATHERED THERE FELL AT SHIVA'S FEET AND BECAME HIS DEVOTEES.



THE NEXT PANEL IN THE MAIN CAVE DEPICTS THE KILLING OF THE DEMON ANDHAKA.



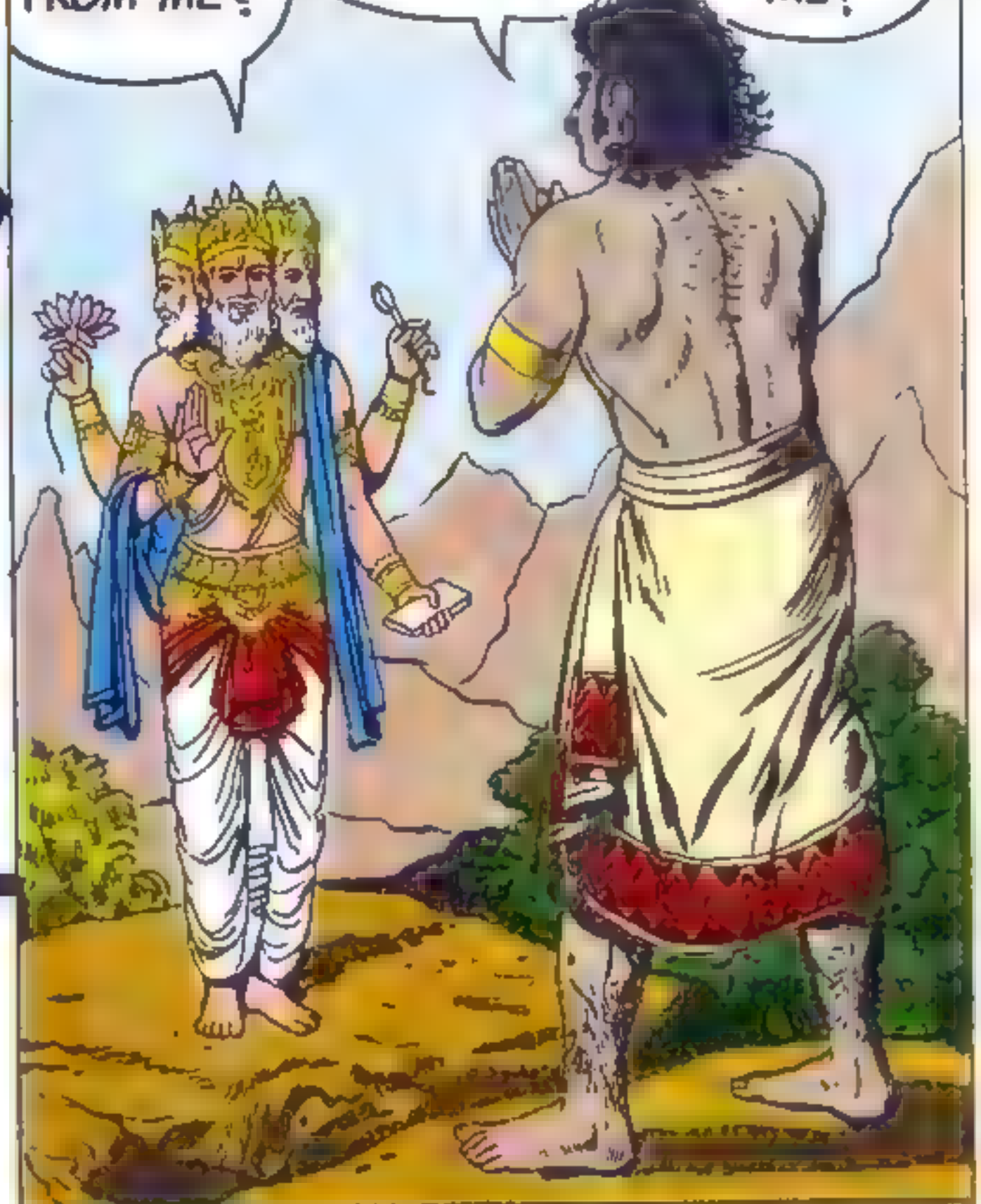
THE ASURA* ANDHAKA* WAS THE SON OF SAGE KASHYAPA AND HIS WIFE DITI.



WHEN ANDHAKA BECAME KING OF THE ASURAS, BY SEVERE PENANCES, HE PLEASSED BRAHMA, THE CREATOR.

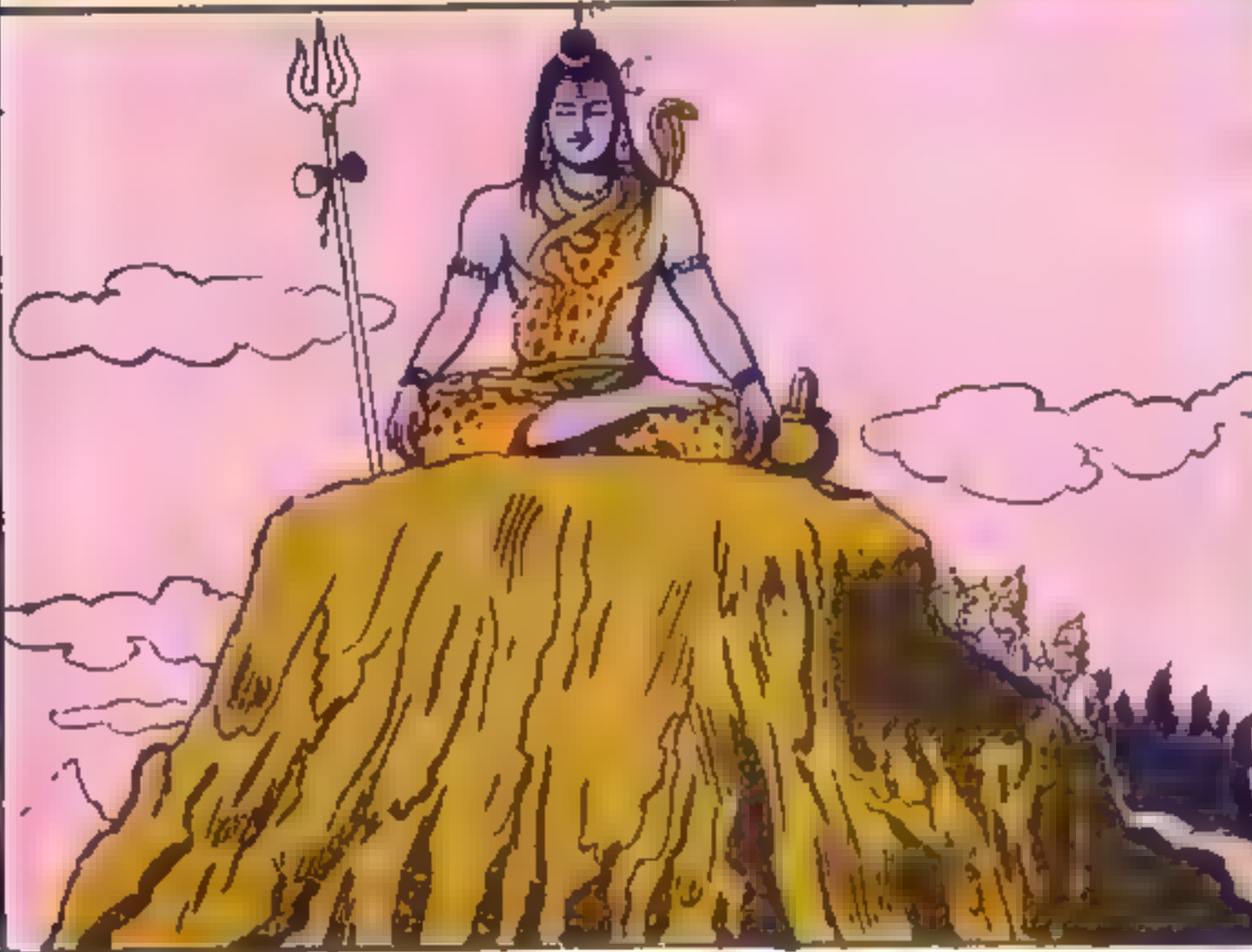
WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

MIGHT AND POWER, GREAT LORD! ALL SHOULD FEAR ME!



BRAHMA GRANTED THE BOON AND VANISHED.

ANDHAKA THEN BEGAN HARASSING THE DEVAS. THEY FLED TO SHIVA FOR HELP.



LORD, SAVE US FROM THAT ASURA!

HE WILL NOT LET US LIVE IN PEACE.

I WILL TEACH ANDHAKA A LESSON.



WHEN ANDHAKA LEARNT OF SHIVA'S INTENTIONS, HE SENT FOR THE EVIL NILA.

GO! DESTROY SHIVA!



BUT IN THE BATTLE BETWEEN SHIVA AND NILA, IT WAS THE LATTER WHO WAS SLAIN

* DEMON + SYMBOLISING DARKNESS AND IGNORANCE

MEANWHILE, ANDHAKA HAD SNEAKED INTO KAILASA TO CARRY AWAY PARVATI.

COME AWAY WITH ME. I AM GREATER THAN SHIVA.

GO AWAY FROM HERE, YOU EVIL DEMON!

AT THAT MOMENT, SHIVA RETURNED.

YOU HAVE GONE TOO FAR, ANDHAKA.

I AM READY TO RECEIVE YOUR ARROWS!

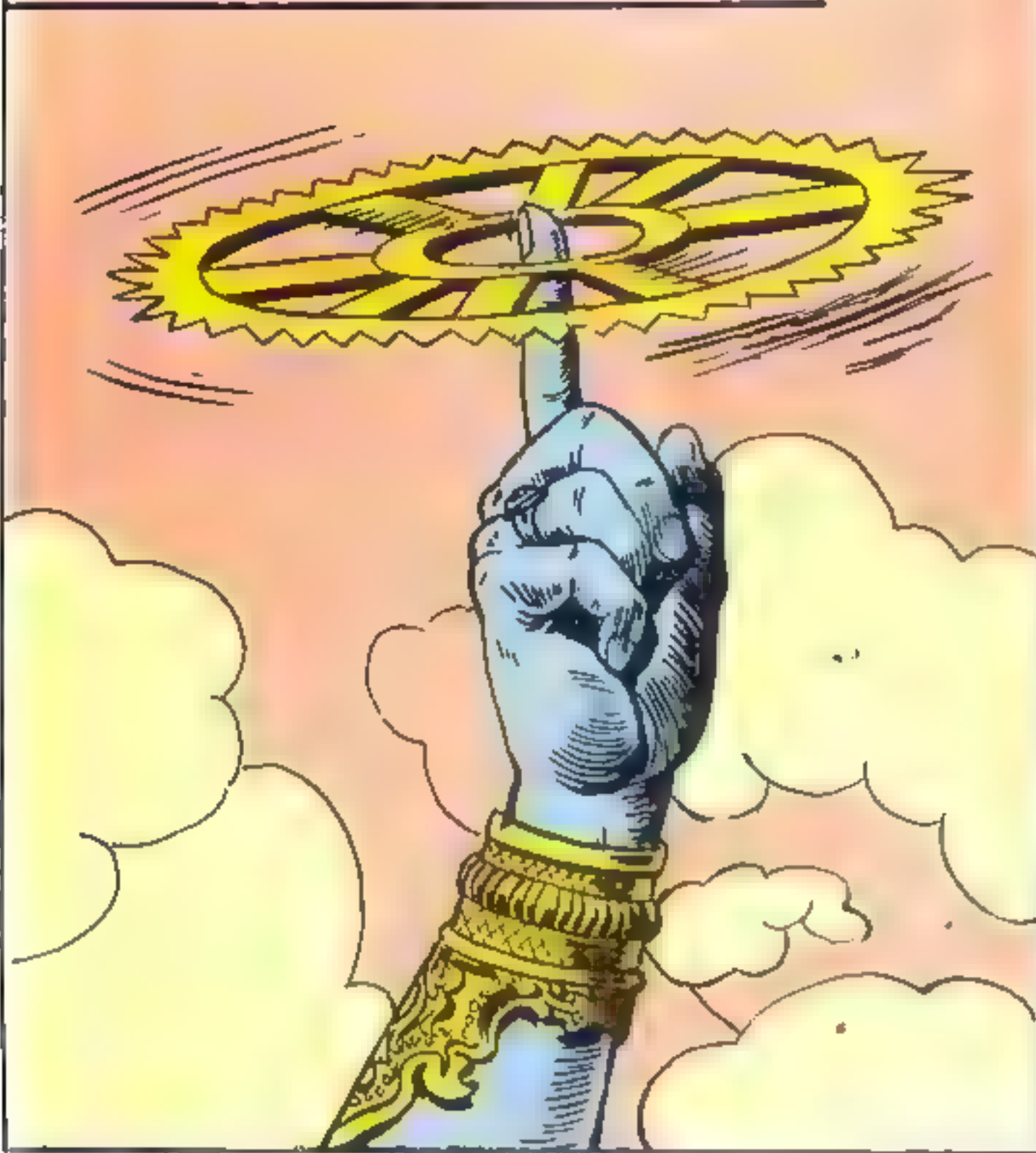
SHIVA'S ARROWS STRUCK THE ASURA, BUT EACH DROP OF BLOOD AS IT TOUCHED THE EARTH BECAME ANOTHER ASURA, FOR EVIL AND IGNORANCE ALWAYS MULTIPLY FAST. VISHNU CAME TO WATCH THIS COMBAT.

SHIVA NEEDS HELP.

ANDHAKA IS IMMORTAL!

ANDHAKA CAN NEVER DIE!

VISHNU RAISED HIS FINGER ...



... AND SENT HIS SUDARSHANA CHAKRA * FLYING.



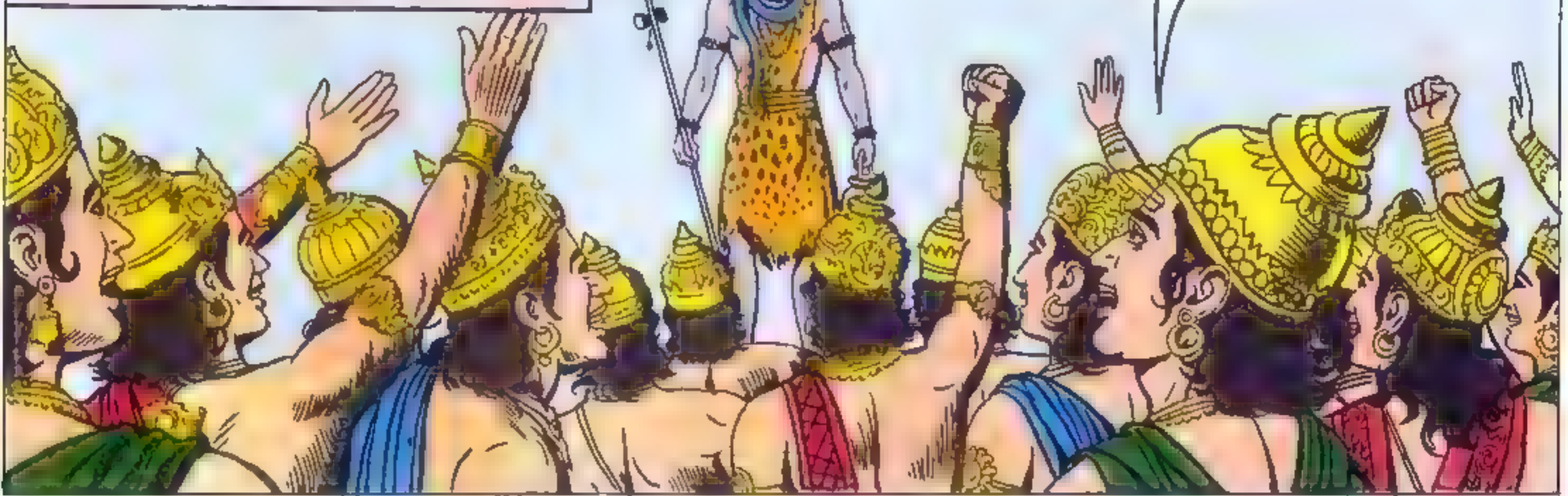
YOU SHALL NEVER
RISE AGAIN, EVIL
ONES!



MEANWHILE, AS SHIVA
ATTACKED AND KILLED
ANDHAKA, HE MADE
SURE THAT NOT A
DROP OF BLOOD FELL
TO THE GROUND, SO
THAT NO NEW ASURAS
WOULD SPRING UP.



SHIVA, THE DESTROYER OF EVIL
HAD VANQUISHED THE FORCES
OF DARKNESS AND BROUGHT
LIGHT INTO THE WORLD.

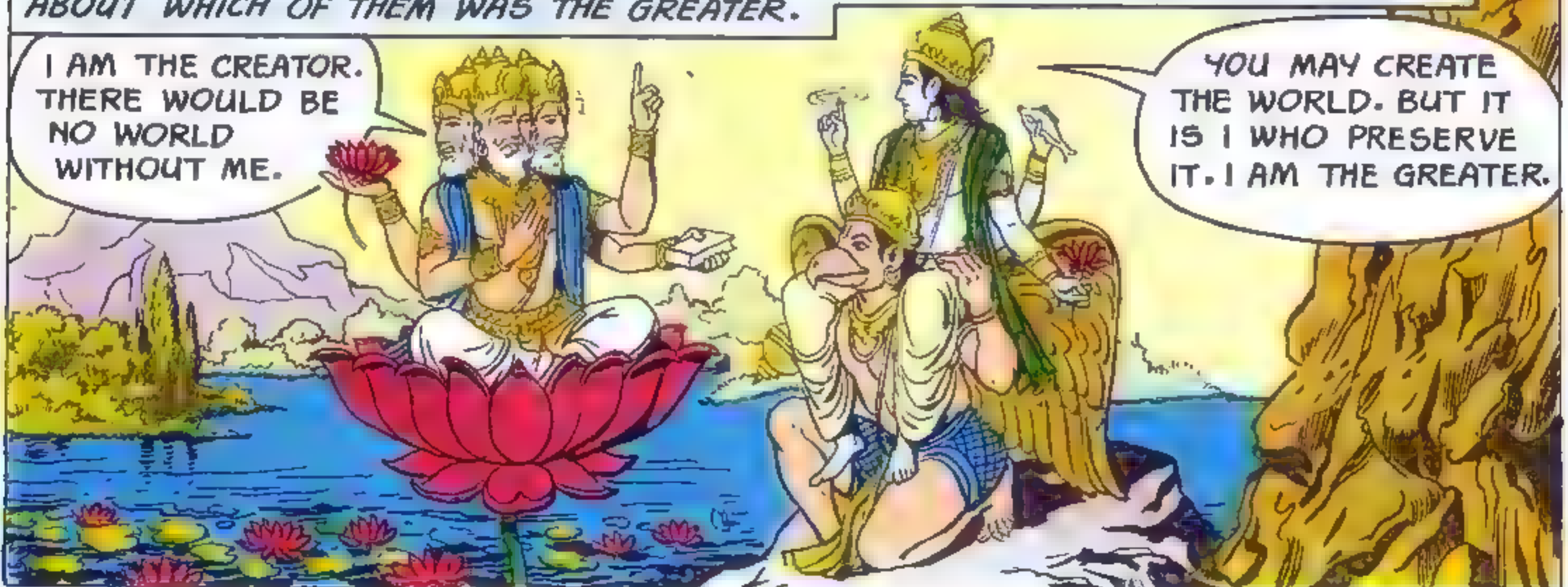


IN ONE END OF
THE MAIN CAVE
IS THE SHRINE
DEDICATED TO
SHIVA IN THE
FORM OF A
LINGAM. IT IS
GUARDED ON ALL
SIDES BY
DWARAPALAS*.



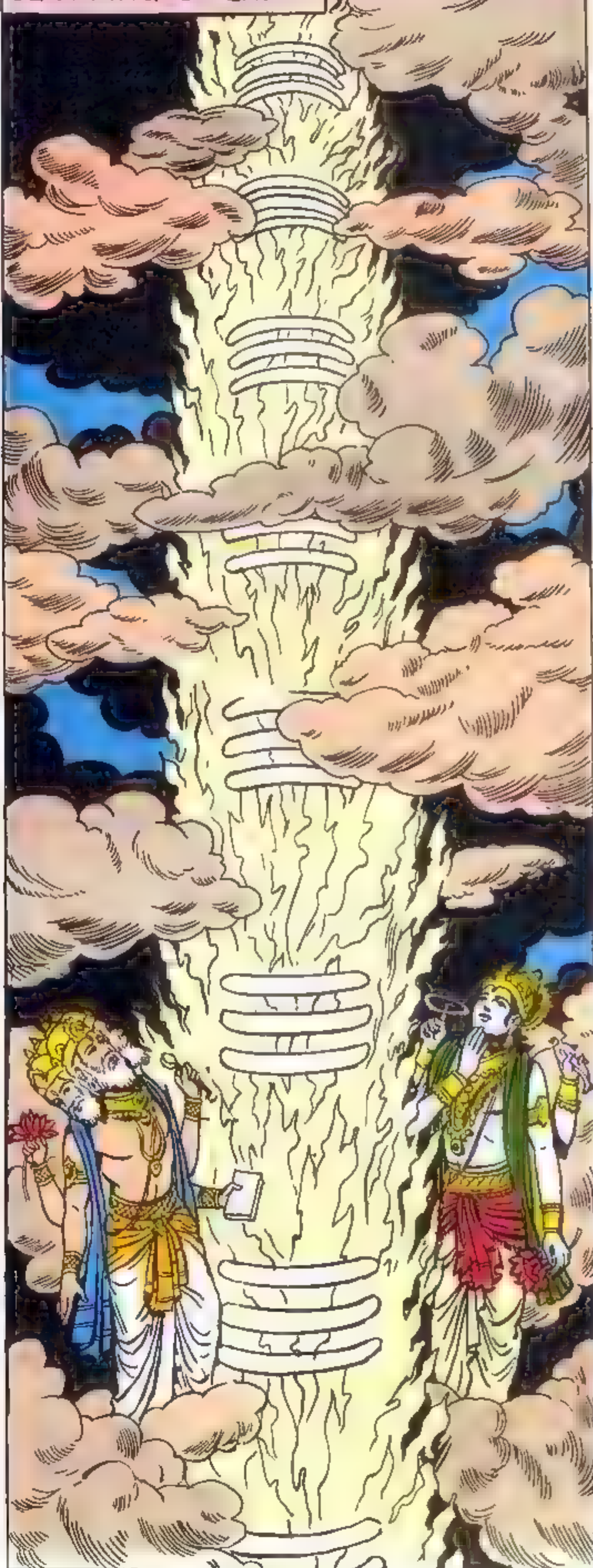
ONE DAY, BRAHMA, THE CREATOR, AND VISHNU, THE PRESERVER, WERE ARGUING
ABOUT WHICH OF THEM WAS THE GREATER.

I AM THE CREATOR.
THERE WOULD BE
NO WORLD
WITHOUT ME.



YOU MAY CREATE
THE WORLD. BUT IT
IS I WHO PRESERVE
IT. I AM THE GREATER.

SUDDENLY, THERE APPEARED AN ENDLESS FIERY PILLAR, A LINGAM, WITHOUT BEGINNING OR END.



VISHNU, IN THE FORM OF A BOAR, BURROWED INTO THE EARTH.



BRAHMA, IN THE FORM OF A SWAN, FLEW HIGHER AND HIGHER INTO THE HEAVENS.



AFTER COUNTLESS YEARS, THE BOAR RETURNED EXHAUSTED.



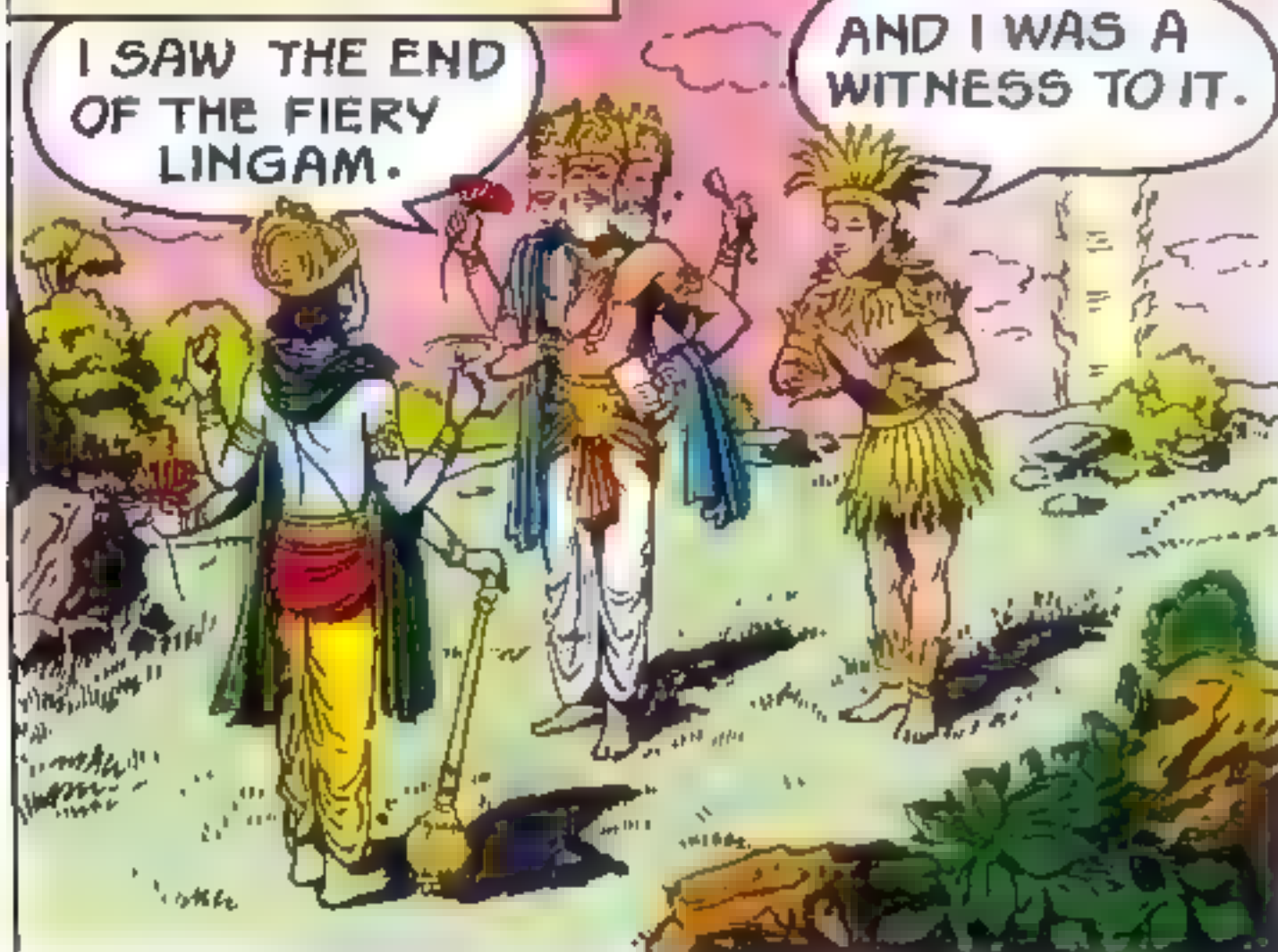
NEITHER DID BRAHMA SUCCEED IN HIS MISSION. BUT —



SUDDENLY HE SAW A KETAKI FLOWER FALL FROM THE HEAVENS.



BRAHMA ASSUMED HIS REAL FORM AND WENT TO VISHNU ALONG WITH THE KETAKI FLOWER.



I BOW TO YOU, LORD BRAHMA. YOU ARE THE GREATEST OF US ALL.



SUDDENLY, SHIVA EMERGED FROM THE CENTRE OF THE FIERY LINGAM.

BRAHMA, YOU HAVE BEEN DISHONEST! FROM NOW ON, NONE SHALL HONOUR YOU. NOR WILL YOU HAVE YOUR OWN TEMPLE OR FESTIVAL.



AND YOU SHALL NO LONGER BE USED FOR WORSHIP IN MY TEMPLE.



YOU ARE WITHOUT BEGINNING AND HAVE NO END. IT IS OUT OF IGNORANCE THAT WE MADE THIS QUEST. FORGIVE US!

DEAR HARI, YOU ARE A LOVER OF TRUTH! I AM PLEASED WITH YOU. YOU WILL ALWAYS BE HONoured AS I AM. YOU WILL HAVE SEPARATE TEMPLES AND FESTIVALS AND WILL BE LOVED BY THE PEOPLE AS I AM.



AND TO THIS DAY THERE ARE TEMPLES AND FESTIVALS CONNECTED WITH THE WORSHIP OF SHIVA AND VISHNU BUT FEW WORSHIP HIM WHO IS THE CREATOR.

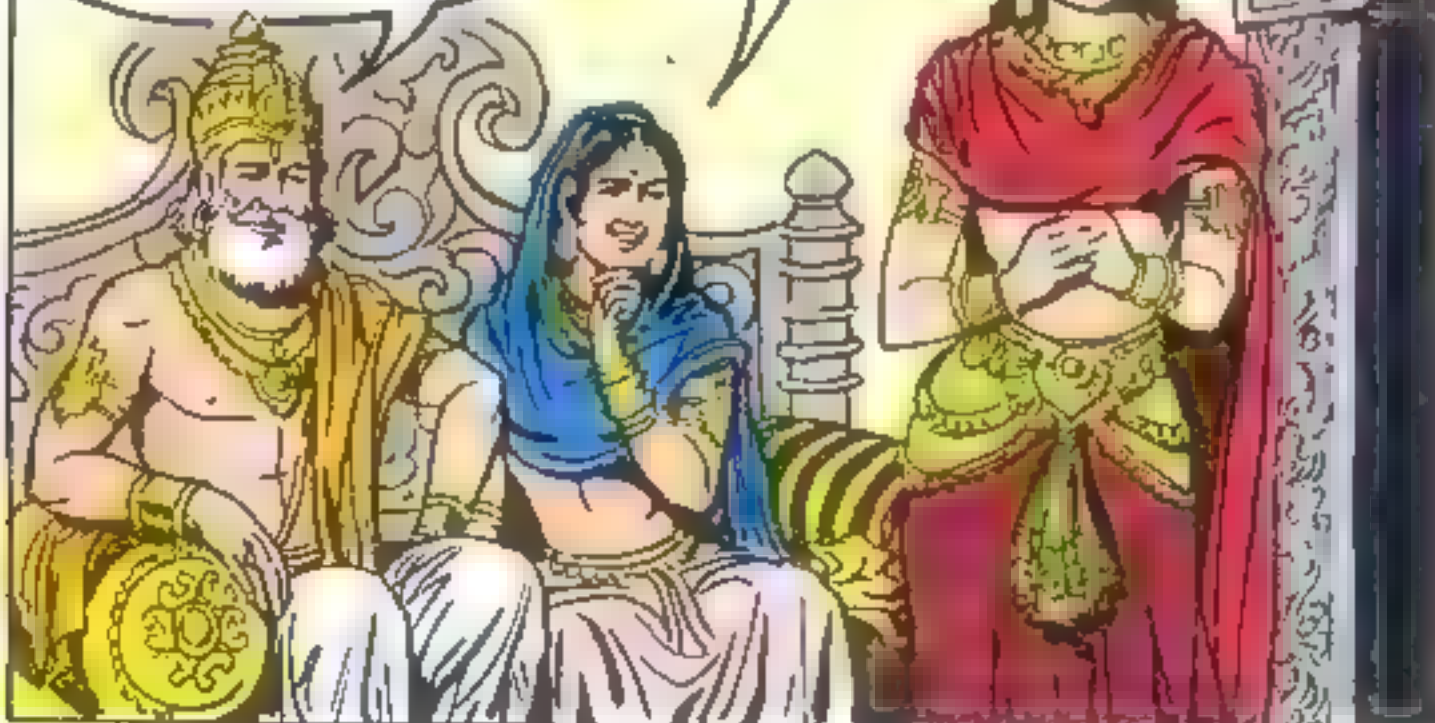
ONE OF THE MOST EXQUISITE PANELS AT ELEPHANTA IS THAT OF THE MARRIAGE OF SHIVA AND PARVATI.



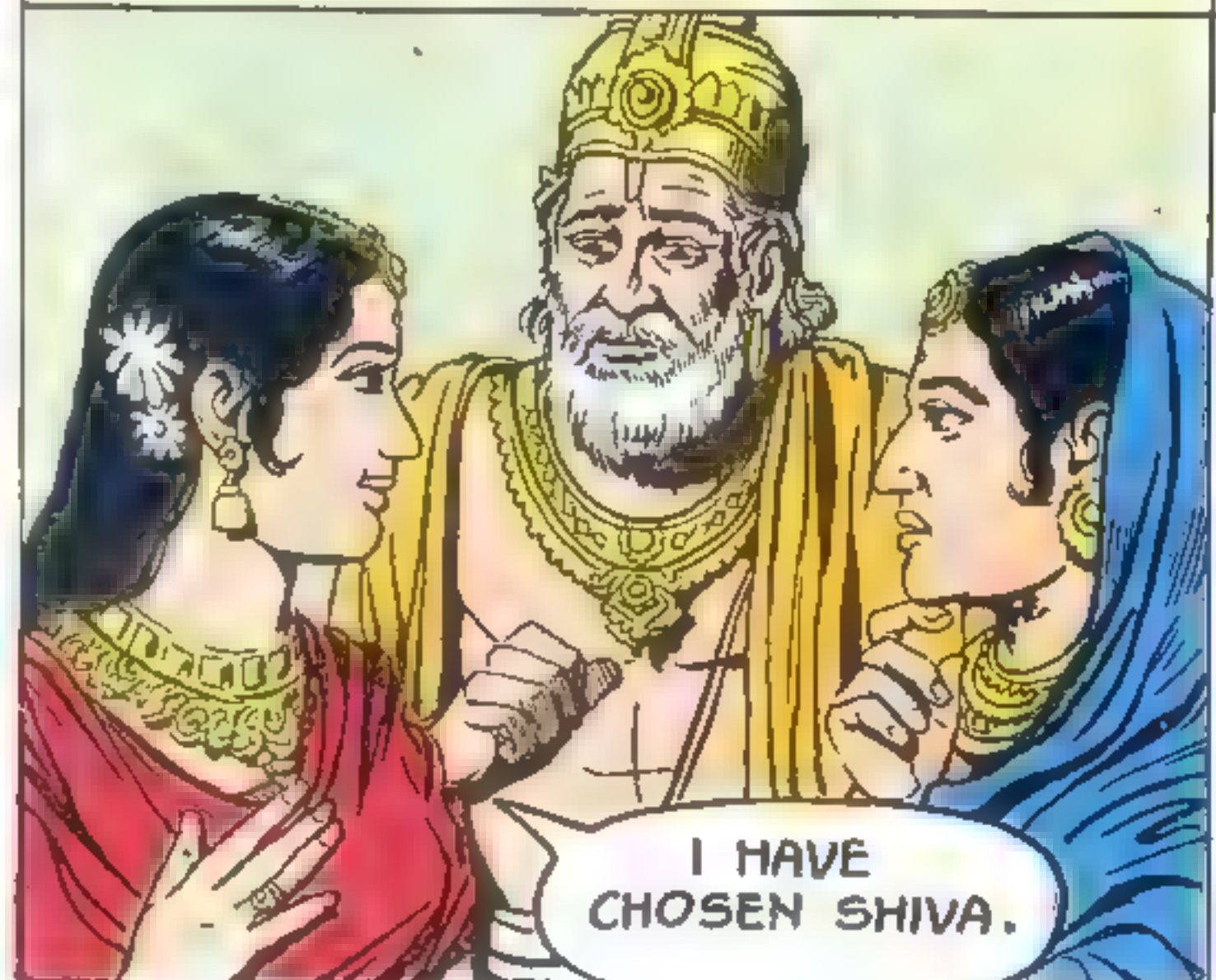
UMA* WAS THE DAUGHTER OF HIMAVAN† AND MENA, HIS WIFE. THEY DOTED ON THEIR LOVELY DAUGHTER.

ONLY THE
GREATEST OF
KINGS IS GOOD
ENOUGH FOR
HER.

AND THE
MOST
HANDSOME!



BUT UMA HAD MADE HER OWN CHOICE.



* PARVATI † THE HIMALAYAS

TO WOO AND WIN SHIVA, THE ASCETIC GOD, UMA TOOK TO MEDITATION...



...AND PRACTISED THE SEVEREST OF AUSTERITIES.



ONE DAY, AN OLD BRAHMANA APPEARED BEFORE HER.

YOU ARE YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL. YOU SHOULD BE ENJOYING LIFE. AUSTERITIES ARE FOR THE OLD! WHY HAVE YOU RENOUNCED THE WORLD?



TO WIN THE LOVE OF SHIVA. I WISH TO MARRY HIM.

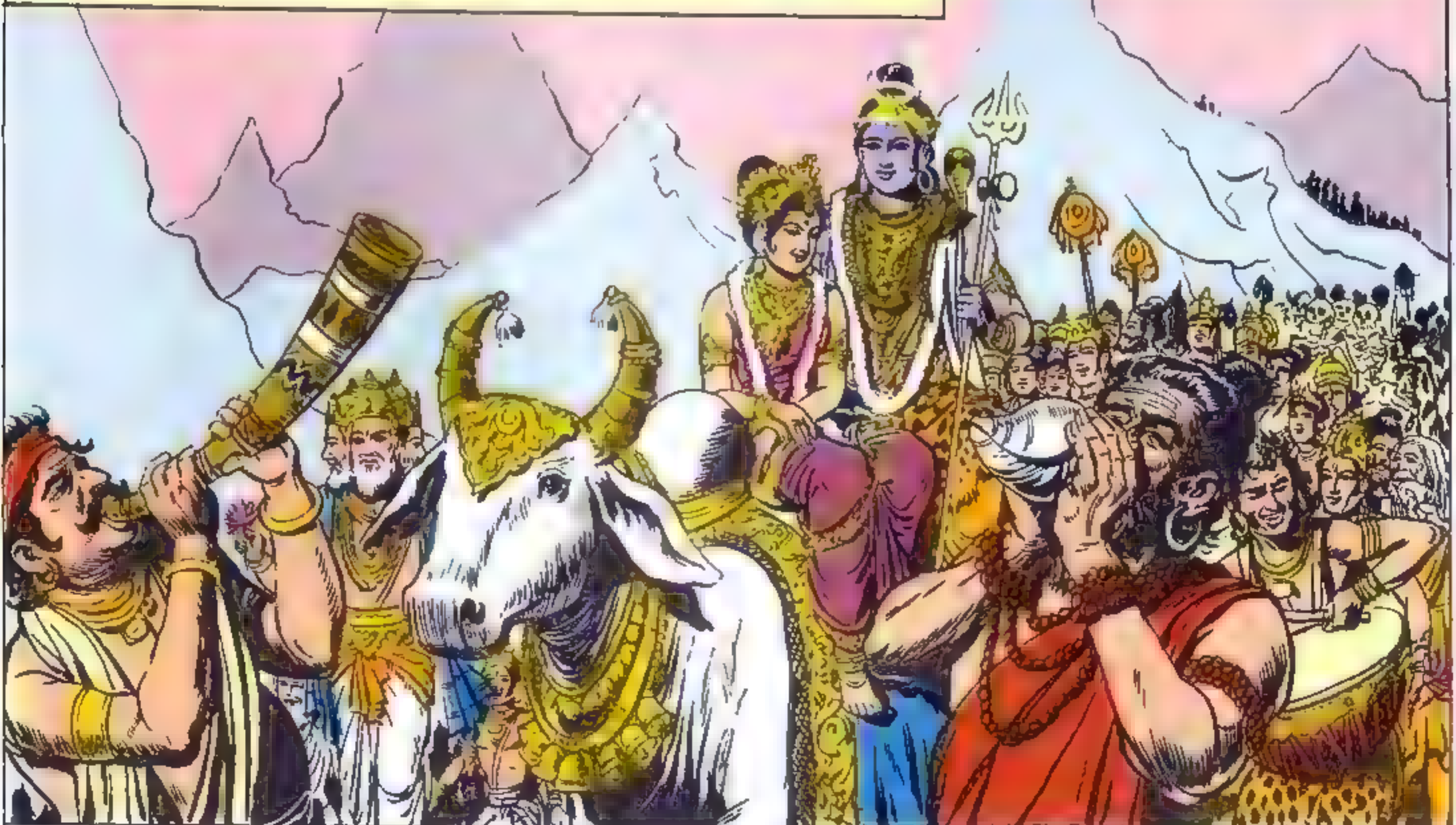
THAT MENDICANT?





SUDDENLY, THE OLD MAN CHANGED HIS FORM AND BEHOLD! IT WAS THE GREAT LORD HIMSELF.

AND PARVATI WAS MARRIED TO SHIVA. HIMAVAN GAVE THE BRIDE AWAY. BRAHMA, THE CREATOR, ACTED AS PRIEST. VISHNU STOOD BY WATCHING THE BEAUTIFUL, SHY PARVATI WED THE GREAT SHIVA. MAINAKA, THE SON OF HIMAVAN, CARRIED THE CELESTIAL WATERS FOR THE CEREMONY.



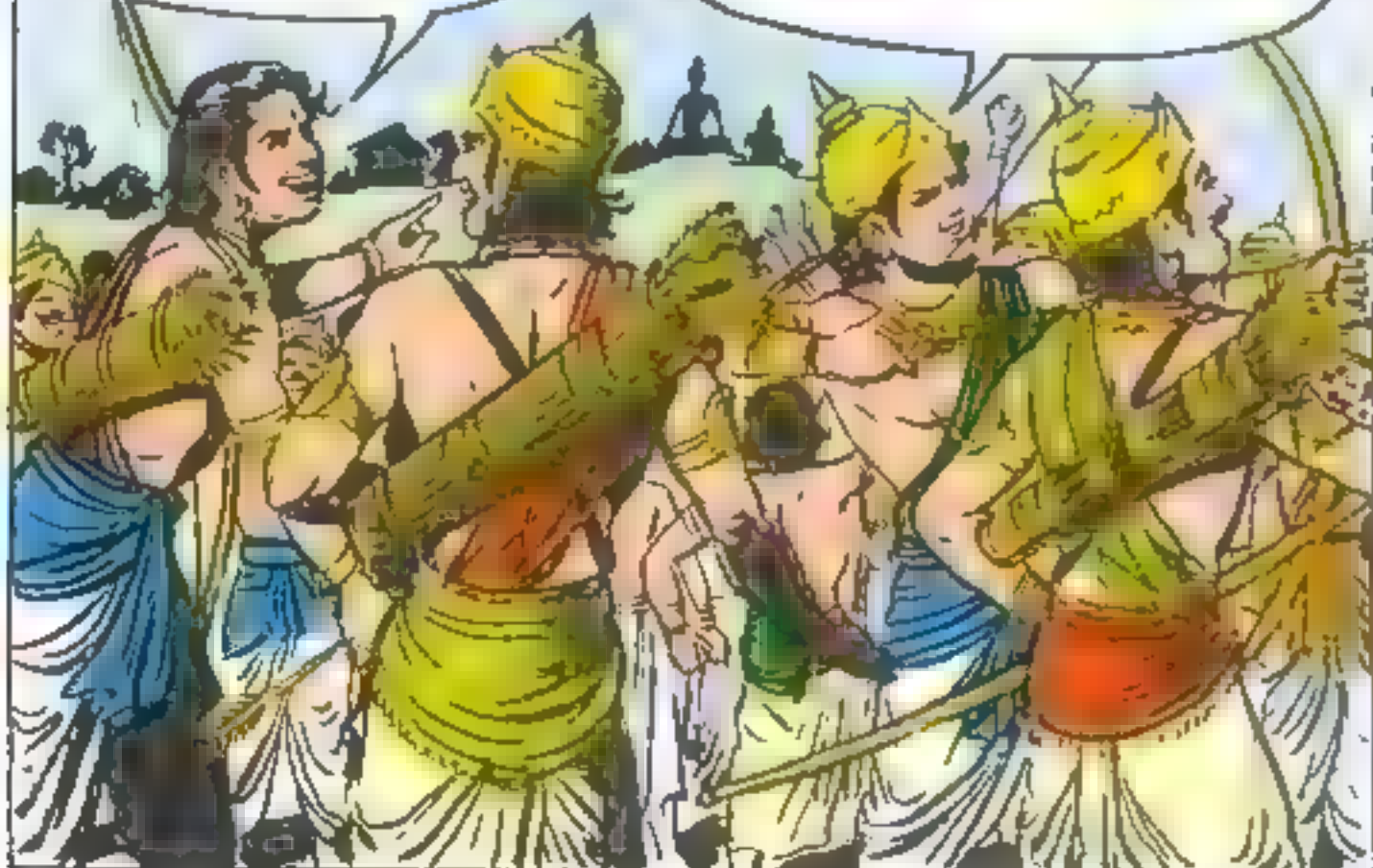
THE NEXT PANEL IN THE MAIN CAVE IS OF SHIVA AS GANGADHARA * SHOWING THE DESCENT OF THE GANGA TO THE EARTH.



SAGARA, A GREAT RULER OF THE IKSHVAKU DYNASTY, HAD SIXTY THOUSAND WICKED SONS WHO CONSTANTLY HARASSED THE DEVAS AND THE RISHIS.

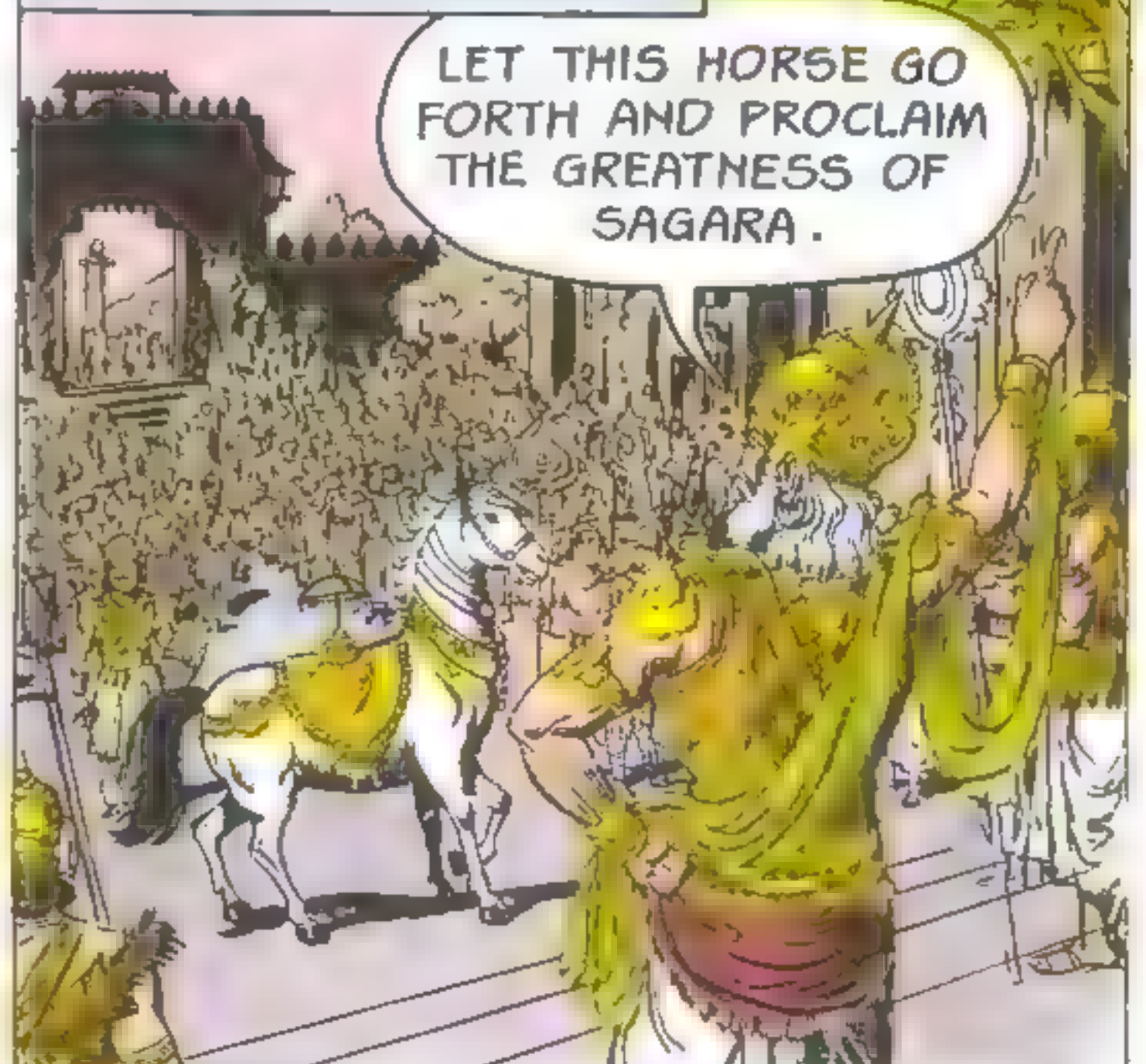
LET US DISTURB THAT RISHI IN MEDITATION.

LET US SHOOT AN ARROW BETWEEN THOSE TWO DEVAS.



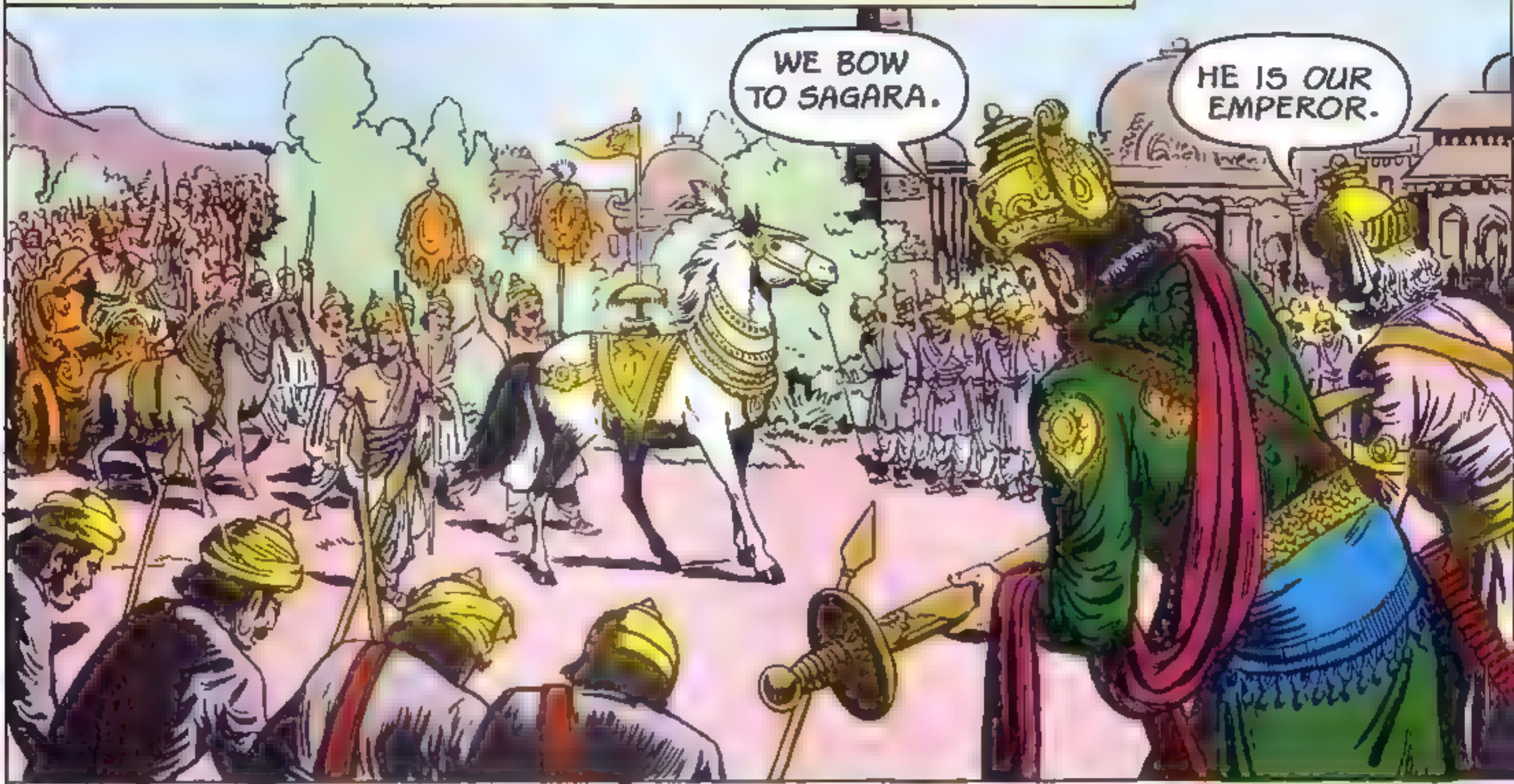
ONCE SAGARA PERFORMED THE ASHWAMEDHA YAGNA †

LET THIS HORSE GO FORTH AND PROCLAIM THE GREATNESS OF SAGARA.



* THE ONE WHO HOLDS GANGA IN HIS MATTED LOCKS
† HORSE SACRIFICE

IN THE TRADITION OF THE TIMES, A KING WHO ASPIRED TO RULE THE WORLD WOULD LET LOOSE A HORSE WITH AUSPICIOUS MARKS. ANYONE WHO STOPPED THE HORSE WOULD BE CONSIDERED AN ENEMY AND WOULD BE ATTACKED BY THE ARMIES FOLLOWING THE HORSE. AFTER DEFEATING THE CHALLENGERS, IF ANY, THE HORSE WOULD BE BROUGHT BACK AND A YAGNA WOULD BE HELD TO CELEBRATE THE CONQUEST OF THE TERRITORIES TRAVERSED BY THE HORSE.



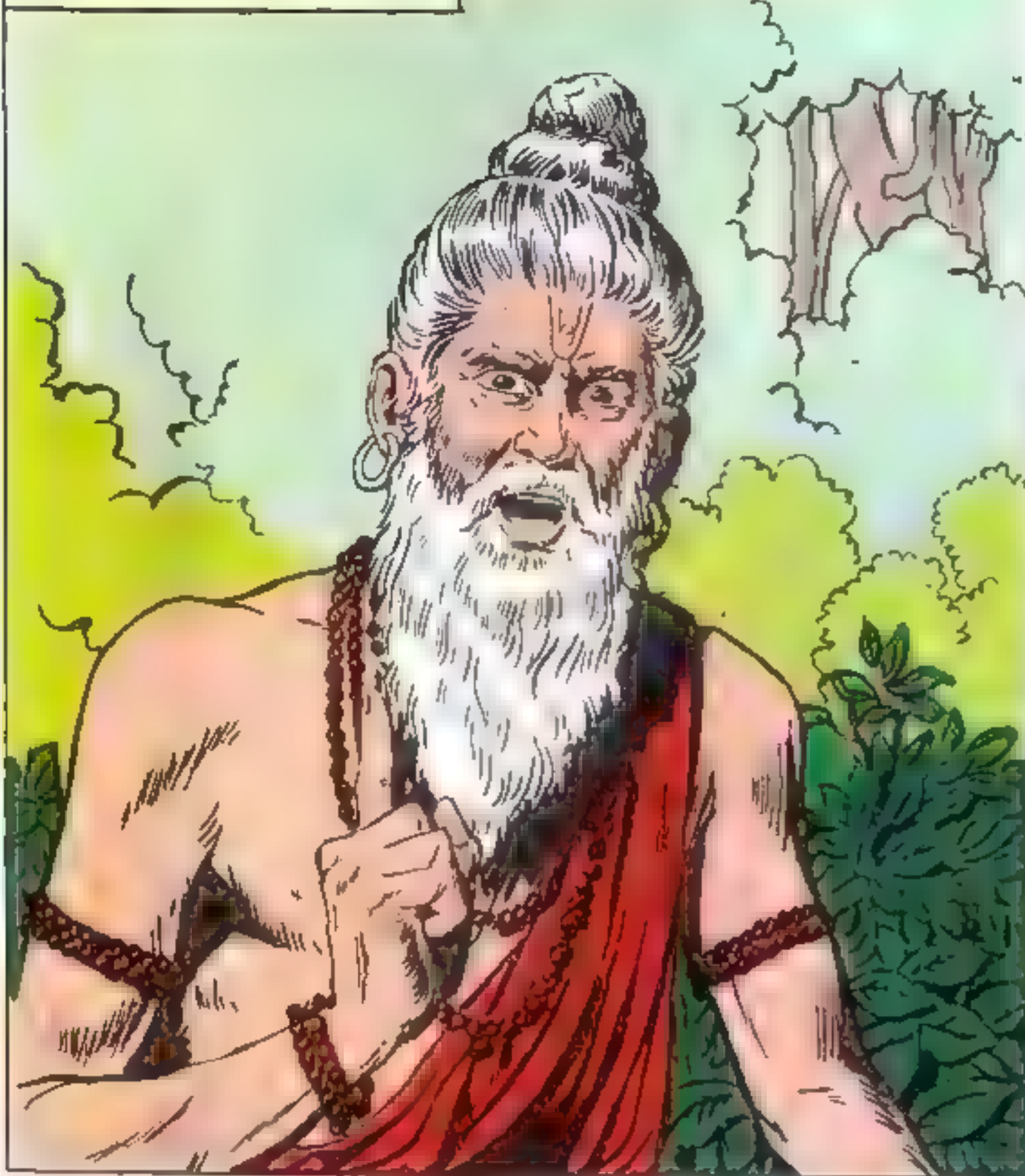
INDRA, AFRAID THAT SAGARA WITH HIS GROWING POWER MIGHT DETHRONE HIM, STOLE THE HORSE AND LEFT IT IN THE HERMITAGE OF RISHI KAPILA.



AS WAS INTENDED, SAGARA'S SONS THOUGHT THAT KAPILA HAD STOLEN THE HORSE, AND RUSHED TO ATTACK HIM.



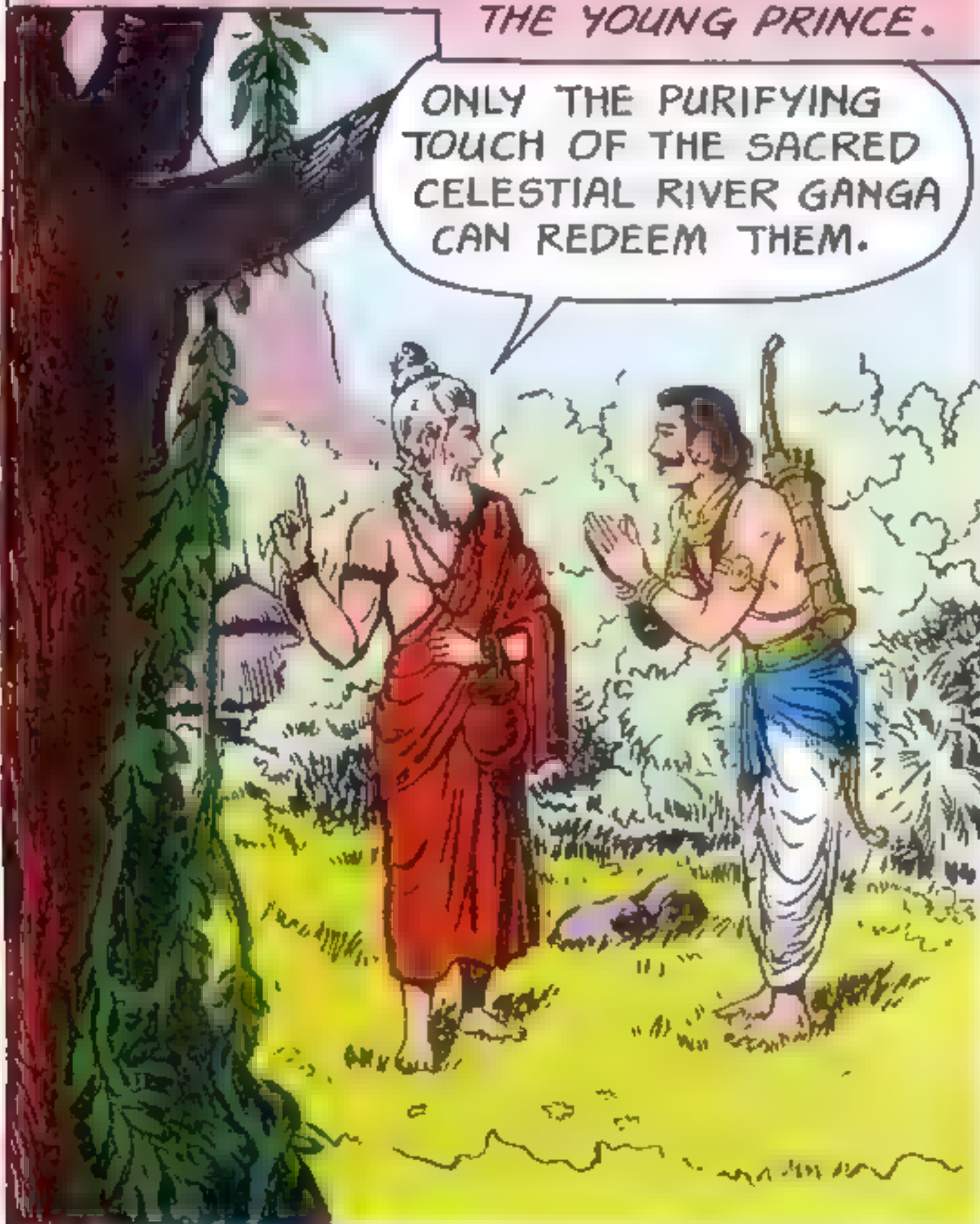
THE NEXT MOMENT, THE POWERFUL SAGE OPENED HIS EYES IN ANGER AND REDUCED THEM TO ASHES.



MEANWHILE, WHEN HIS SONS DID NOT RETURN, SAGARA TURNED TO HIS GRANDSON, AMSHUMAN.



AMSHUMAN FOUND THE HORSE IN KAPILA'S ASHRAMA. THE SAGE WAS IMPRESSED BY THE YOUNG PRINCE.

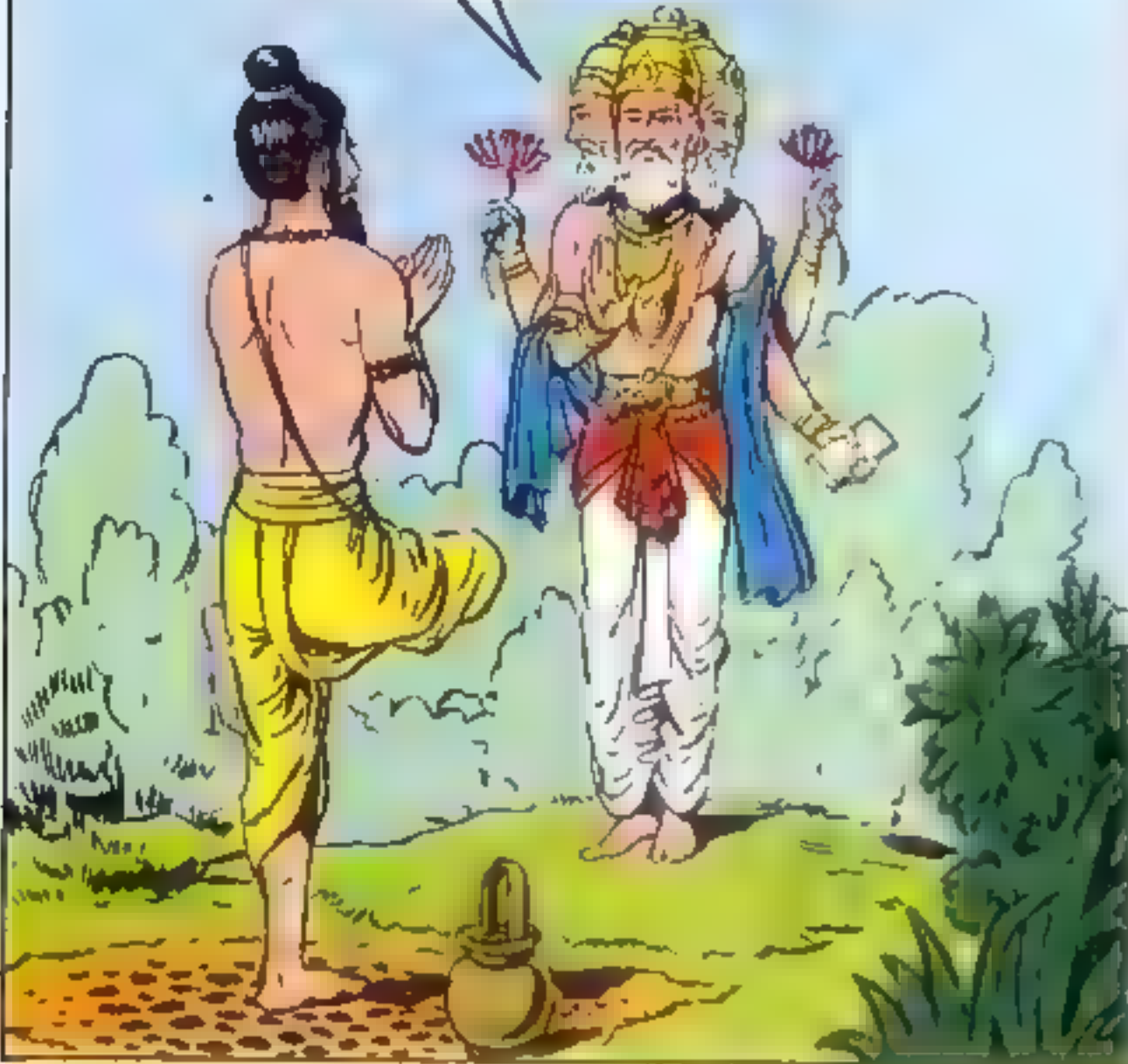


GANGA HAD TO BE BROUGHT DOWN TO THE EARTH. SAGARA AND AMSHUMAN FAILED IN THEIR EFFORTS. THEN AMSHUMAN'S SON, DILIPA TRIED. BUT —



DILIPA'S SON, BHAGIRATHA, UNDERTOOK SEVERE PENANCES TILL BRAHMA, THE CREATOR, STOOD BEFORE HIM.

I AM PLEASED.
I SHALL SEND GANGA
DOWN TO EARTH TO
REDEEM YOUR
ANCESTORS. BUT...



... SHIVA MUST
BREAK HER FALL, OR
THE EARTH WILL BE
WASHED AWAY.

AS SHE HURTTLED DOWN FROM THE HEAVENS,
SHIVA RECEIVED THE TURBULENT GANGA
IN HIS MATTED LOCKS.

BHAGIRATHA UNDERTOOK FURTHER
PENANCES TO PROPITIATE SHIVA.

PLEASE, MY LORD!
BREAK THE FALL OF
THE PROUD GANGA
WHEN SHE COMES
DOWN TO THE
EARTH.

IT SHALL
BE DONE.



AMUSED BY GANGA'S ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE, PARVATI STOOD BY, SMILING WITH PRIDE AT SHIVA'S STRENGTH.



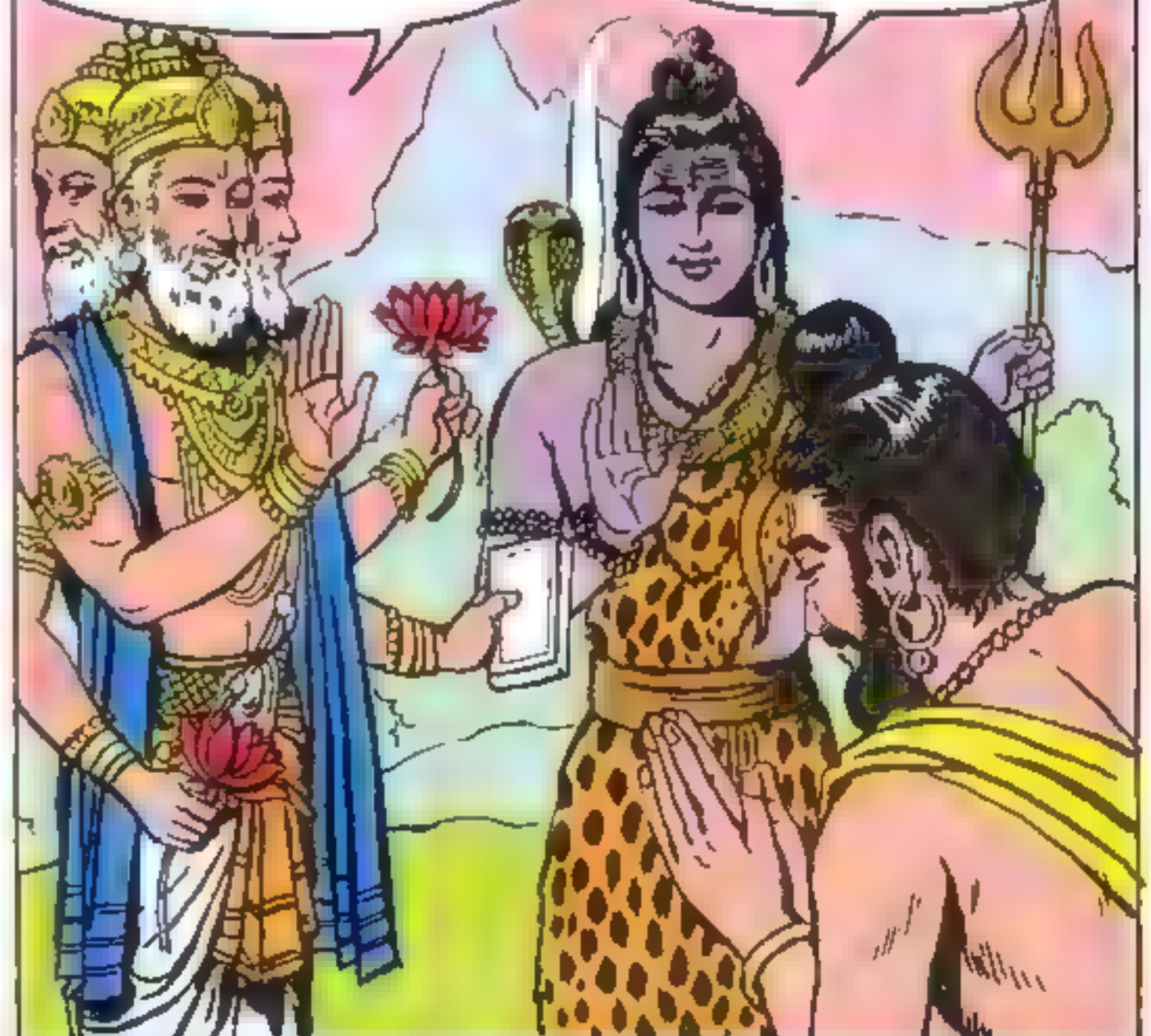
AS SOON AS GANGA FLOWED ONTO THE EARTH, THEN TO THE NETHER REGIONS AND OVER THE ASHES OF BHAGIRATHA'S ANCESTORS, THEY WERE BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE.



BRAHMA AND SHIVA THEN BLESSED BHAGIRATHA.

YOU WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED FOR YOUR STRENGTH OF PURPOSE.

YOUR EFFORTS WILL BE A HOUSEHOLD WORD FOR ALL TIME.



EVEN TO THIS DAY A DIFFICULT TASK WHICH IS ACHIEVED BY SUPERHUMAN EFFORT IS CALLED A BHAGIRATHA PRAYATNA*.

IN THE CENTRE OF THE NORTHERN WALL IS THE GIGANTIC FIGURE OF SHIVA AS MAHESHA, THE SUPREME GOD, COMBINING IN HIMSELF THE QUALITIES OF CREATOR, PRESERVER AND DESTROYER. IN THE CENTRE IS SHIVA, THE CREATOR, HOLDING A MATULUNGA,* THE SYMBOL OF CREATION. ON OUR RIGHT IS SHIVA, THE PRESERVER, HOLDING A LOTUS. ON OUR LEFT IS SHIVA AS RUDRA, THE DESTROYER, HOLDING A COBRA. YET OUT OF DESTRUCTION COMES CREATION AND THE CYCLE OF LIFE.



* A CITRUS FRUIT.

THE NEXT PANEL IS THAT OF ARDHANARISHWARA SHIVA, WHEN SHIVA BECAME ONE WITH HIS WIFE, PARVATI, SYMBOLISING THE UNITY OF THE MALE AND THE FEMALE ELEMENTS IN THE UNIVERSE.



THE PANEL BEYOND SHOWS A DOMESTIC SCENE WITH SHIVA AND PARVATI ON MOUNT KAILASA. PARVATI, PRETENDING TO BE ANGRY, TURNS HER FACE AWAY FROM SHIVA.



THE NEXT PANEL SHOWS THE DEMON-KING, RAVANA, OVERCOME WITH PRIDE IN HIS OWN POWER, ATTEMPTING TO UPROOT AND LIFT MOUNT KAILASA.



I HAVE DONE IT! I AM STRONGER THAN SHIVA HIMSELF!

AS THE MOUNTAIN SHOOK, PARVATI TREMBLED WITH FEAR, BUT SHIVA SMILED.

RAVANA WILL DESTROY US.

AN ARROGANT MAN IS HIS OWN ENEMY. FEAR NOT!

AND PRESSING THE MOUNTAIN DOWN WITH HIS FOOT, SHIVA IMPRISONED RAVANA.

THIS SCULPTURE ALSO SHOWS SHIVA WITH HIS THREE EYES, THE THIRD EYE BEING THE EYE OF ANGER.



ONCE, WHEN SHIVA AND PARVATI WERE ON MOUNT KAILASA, PARVATI PLAYFULLY WENT BEHIND HIM AND CLOSED BOTH HIS EYES.



SHE THEREBY SHUT OUT THE LIGHT IN THE THREE WORLDS AND ALL LIVING THINGS BEGAN TO PERISH.

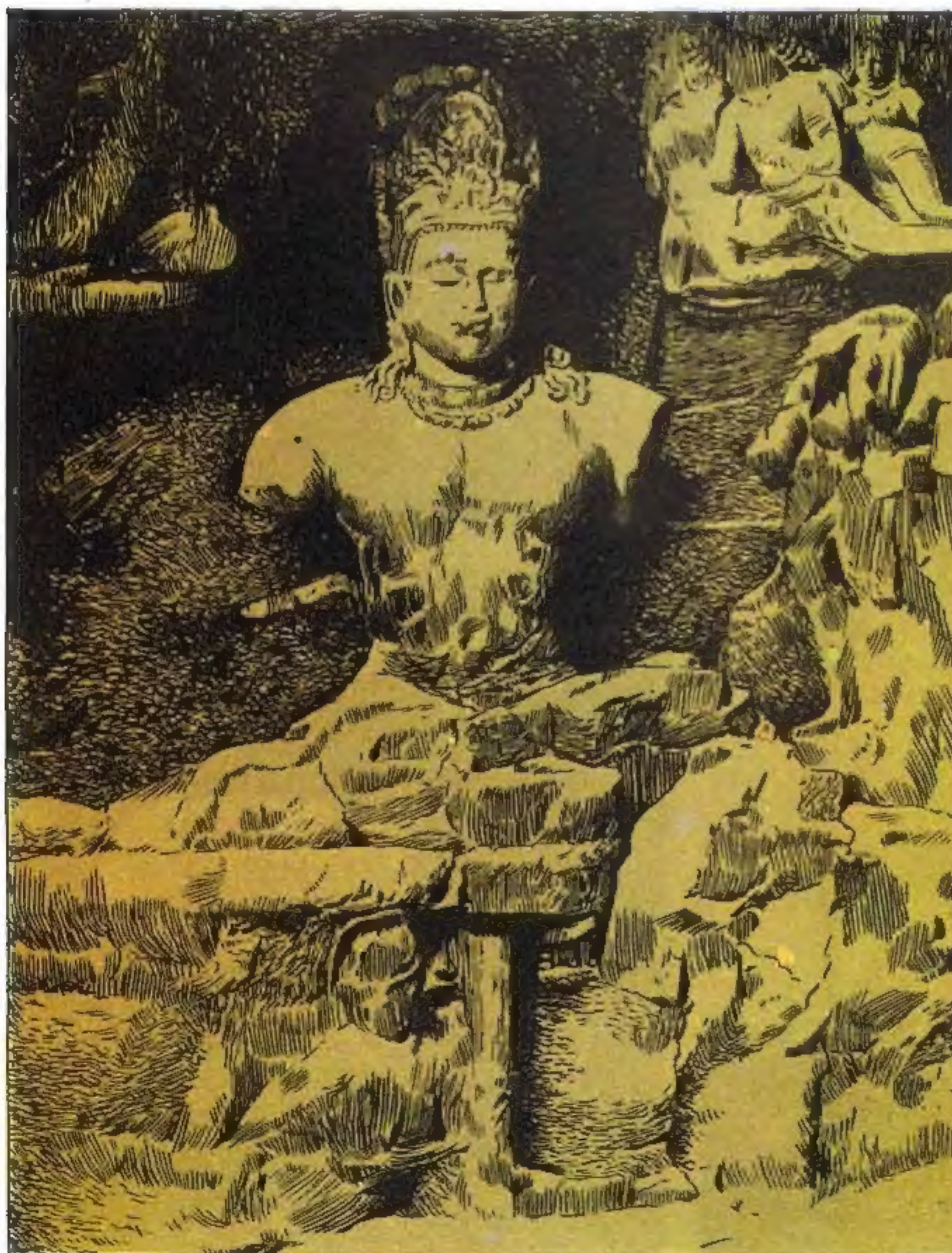
THE SUN HAS
DISAPPEARED!

THE EARTH
IS PLUNGED IN
DARKNESS!

BUT A THIRD EYE APPEARED ON SHIVA'S FOREHEAD, ABOVE PARVATI'S HANDS...



...AND THE UNIVERSE WAS SAVED.

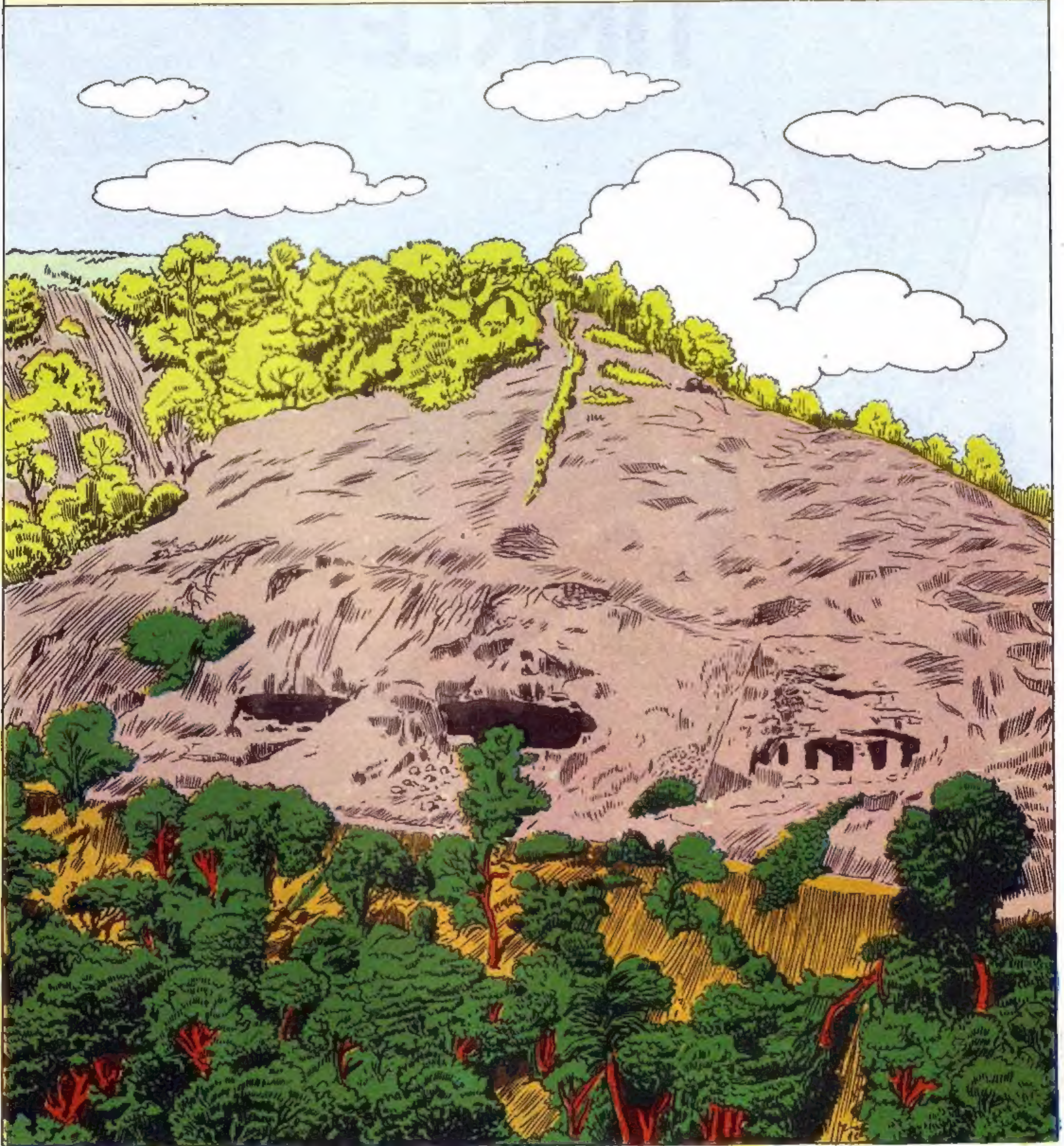


THE LAST PANEL IN THE MAIN CAVE SHOWS SHIVA AS THE GREAT YOGI. HE SITS ON A LOTUS IN MEDITATION. BRAHMA, THE CREATOR, AND INDRA, THE KING OF THE DEVAS GAZE UPON HIM. LIKE THE LOTUS, PURE AND CLEAN, THOUGH IT GROWS IN MUDDY WATERS, HIS FACE REFLECTS THE CALM AND SPIRITUAL STRENGTH OF THE YOGI.

BEYOND, FACING THE LINGAM SHRINE, IS A PEDESTAL WHERE ONCE STOOD NANDI, SHIVA'S VEHICLE, THE BULL.

ELEPHANTA

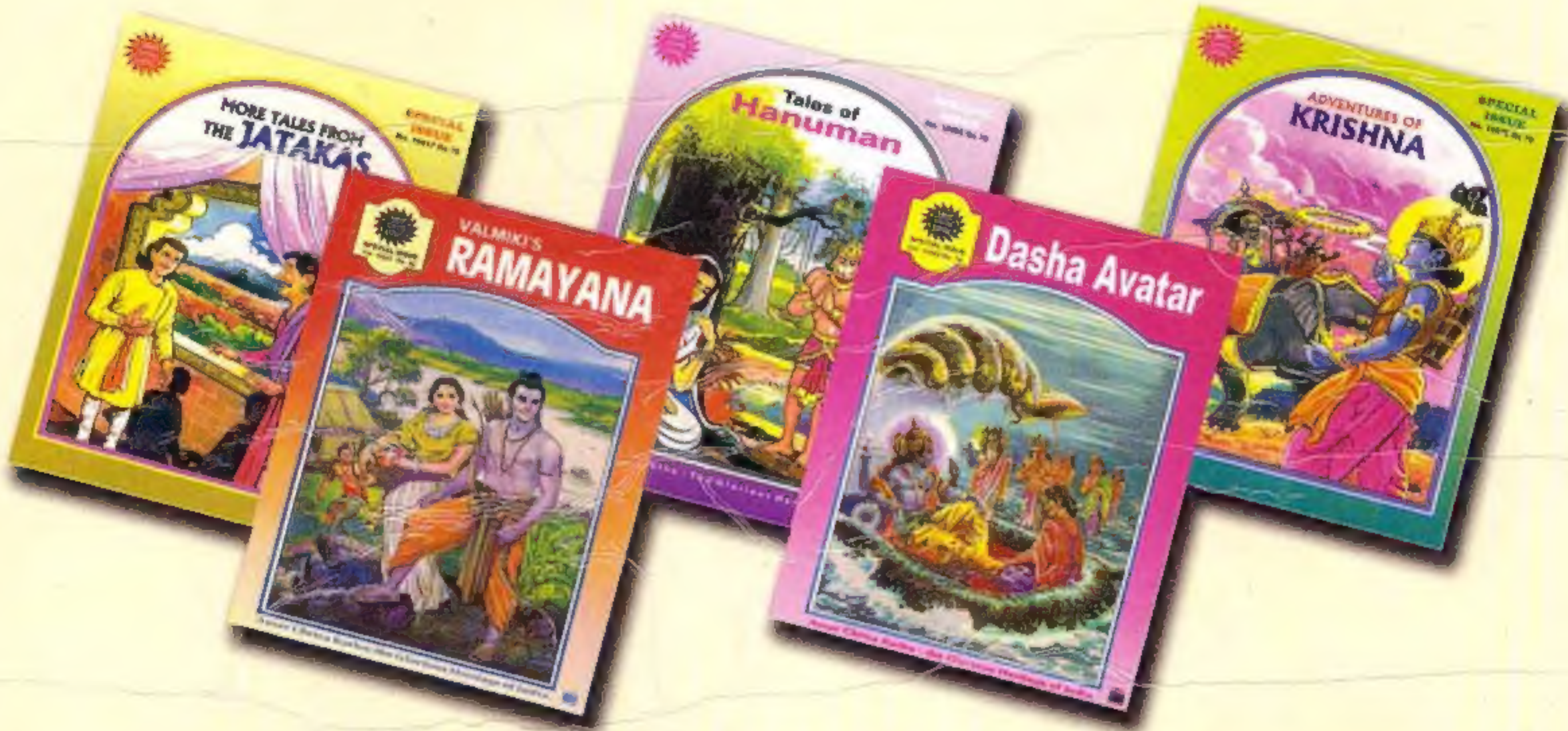
THERE ARE SIX OTHER CAVES ON ELEPHANTA. ALL OF THEM BEAR TESTIMONY TO THE SKILL AND TALENT OF OUR ANCIENT ARCHITECTS AND SCULPTORS. RENOWNED, YET HUMBLE IN THEIR WORSHIP OF THE LORD, THESE CRAFTSMEN TRANSLATED INTO REALITY THE GRANDEUR, THE POWER AND THE BEAUTY OF THE GREAT SHIVA, THE AUSPICIOUS ONE, THE LORD OF THE THREE WORLDS.





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